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ISBN-13: 978-0997836363
ISBN-10: 0997836369

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CHAPTER 1

By the time Bluebird and Britta rolled into regional headquarters the day before the inauguration of the campaign the sun was set high in the sky, illuminating the area in a harsh and malignant brightness though with little succor as to warmth, as the land was now well within a cold and rural southern winter.

As soon as the tread of the tactical vehicle halted numerous members of internal security leapt from the personnel carrier in the back, the oiled black snouts of their automatic weapons gleaming sickly beneath the sun and their anonymous visors reflecting a nothingness, intimating visually to some small degree the foul nature of the eyes which lied within.

The larger part of the two girls' own respective personal units were already situated at a more forward temporary base nearer to the intended line of engagement - feverishly occupied in last-minute logistics of preparing ordnance and checking and double-checking the protective suits which would be a necessity during the raid. The internal security units which accompanied them now were sent straight from the commandant and situated at the very highest tier of their trade - trained by the commander and commandant's own personal guard units and indoctrinated and

prepped for the highest level of sacrifice.

Bluebird stood up upon the seat of the open cab of the vehicle after her joint security retinue had disembarked, stretching herself to her full height and straightening her musculature and limbs to full extension - her reddish hair blowing in the chill wind and a deep frown upon her thin and similarly reddish lips, a slight scar cut across her freckled cheek reacting angrily against the cold beneath livid eyes which alternated between emotions indicating from fey to near uncontrollable violent insanity second by second.

The skin-tight white vinyl bodysuit in which she was attired shined with dramatic contrast against the background of the automotive, painted in utilitarian black primer, and she, deftly mounting the fixed suicide doors, leapt with a cattish pounce onto the ground below strewn with small rocks, her feral appearance accentuated by the small metal claws attached to each individual fingertip which dug into the earth briefly before she rose from her crouch, marching with clipped and terrible authority through the throng of black-masked internal security who parted before her passage.

From the other side of the open cab her associate tittered dementedly, likewise in emulation raising herself up into standing position upon her seat yet simultaneously stretching her arms outward as she did so, palms to the sky, indicating her need for assistance in exiting the vehicle, being as the case may be several years younger than her counterpart and thus somewhat smaller in stature. Her dark brunette hair, never kept long but thick by dent of genetics, had been shorn into a

close-cropped skinhead fashion at her insistence prior to departure from the commander's headquarters proper. Beneath her neckline was situated a strange garment, a largish and somewhat ill-fitting jacket or frock which reached to just above her ankles, composed of a rubbery black fabric designed for purpose rather than appearance, though situated upon its quite young and psychologically unpredictable wearer it lent credence to her reputation as an evil - albeit slight - monk, of a notoriously fell demeanor.

Fourscore internal security personnel approached the ledge of the vehicle on either side of Britta, who smiled broadly betwixt her laughter, the taut and very white yet somewhat cosmetically dirty skin of her face crinkled in young and girlish mirth and expectancy, a few tell-tale shades of dried blood clearly visible upon the sides of her upturned mouth.

Two of the internal security members grasped her outstretched hands then cradled her shoulders in additional support as she swung her legs over the ledge and allowed the other part of their number to cradle her thighs and backside, lowering her slowly to the ground in a regal seated posture.

During this ceremonious descent she lolled her shaved head back upon her own neck, cackling, before returning to an upright posture and then bending her head forward to smile down at the guards on either side of her - appreciating the involuntary caresses of their gloved hands upon her flesh through the thick rubber garment, underneath which she was nearly naked - equally appreciating yet on a more cerebral level the

dedication which was their portion and lot as her very real martyrdom troops, should any harm come near her. As they gently situated her into standing posture she cooed appreciably and then ran after Bluebird with abandon, her black garments flapping against her lower legs, lacking the comparable pomp and circumstance of her older counterpart yet no less deadly.

The outward regional headquarters building was entirely utilitarian in nature yet had been adorned as befitting the immediate residence of the future administrators of the new area and was profusely staffed with internal security and intelligence for on-the-ground logistical support as well as acting as barracks for members of the baby brigades further in the interior of the drab bureaucratic building where the temporary residential areas for Bluebird and Britta had been established prior to their arrival.

As the transformation of the area commenced, both prior to and post the initial assault scheduled for the next day, these residential quarters would be the temporary dwelling place for the higher-tier of the impugning organizational forces - the two girls included - while the occupying forces in the forward areas went about their task of building up and/or co-opting existent administrative facilities and infrastructure and engaged in creating the new. While both Bluebird and Britta would be - including inhabiting the initial raid - in the new area for various purposes designed to imprint their authority on the area, the outward regional headquarters would be their domicile pending a permanent home and base for the immediate future.

The two dark goddesses entered through a large doorway atop a shallow smattering of steps which was thrown back and opened as they approached - the ledge on either side flanked by anonymous internal security who greeted them with a silence that held within it an expectancy and foreknowledge of what was to come. That the two were now in their midst meant that the campaign was now to commence in earnest. Though planning and preparation at the forward operating center had been ongoing for weeks and the planning and preparation prior to that for many months - at the former border camp back when Bluebird had still been residing - the arrival of the principals indicated beyond the shadow of a doubt that full ignition would soon begin.

Immediately inside the regional command headquarters Bluebird and Britta's personal retinue fell back and their presence was replaced by masked internal security personnel of no distinguishable rank designation and as such instantly recognizable as direct representatives of the commander who had been sent to await their arrival.

Once inside the internal security members on either side of the girls grasped their upper arms tightly, others with hands on their shoulder and the back of their necks as they marched them along briskly further into regional command.

At their sudden touch Britta looked up into the anonymous lens of their masks and hissed like a rattlesnake, thrashing her arm and nearly making the internal security member lose their grip. Bluebird glanced over at her and gave the younger girl a look of

motherly reprimand and an audible 'tut' before turning her attention forward. Despite her demonstrable disapproval Bluebird, as ever, found her counterpart's theatrics to be highly amusing.

The hallways of regional command which stretched before them were devoid of character and impersonal in the extreme - identical paneled walls with doorways that led into self-contained office suites also identically spaced and arranged along the corridors. For someone not familiar with the building it would be easy to become lost due to the unchanging internal appearance of the labyrinthine structure. Spaced along the paneled walls were small blue lights that gave off a cold, corpse-like glow which reflected obscenely upon the lurid contours of Bluebird's skintight white vinyl bodysuit and glinted dangerously as their light reflected off the razor sharp claws which tipped each one of her fingers.

Bluebird smiled to herself - the coloring of the illumination was by no means coincidental but rather directly correlated to her namesake, given to her in the depths of the commandant's training center, and to her position as area administrator, the preliminary stages of establishing her cult in the area having only begun. What would happen tomorrow in the field and in the days that followed would be the true test and indicator of how her legacy would present itself in the land, symbols and psyche of the area that now situated itself upon the very precipice of its own doom. Beyond - the incomprehensible darkness that Bluebird and her associate's iron-fisted dictatorial reign would bring.

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The internal security personnel turned the two girls left and then right again, moving them into ever more remote sections of the building as evidenced by the fact that no organization members were seen here and there moving from one area to the other or ducking into offices in the concourse of their duties as was immediately apparent when first entering. The baby brigade barracks would have been instantly detected audibly by Bluebird as a former den mother and by Britta as a former resident and administrative assistant even from afar, yet neither of them had heard or seen any indicator that any of the youthful charges were anywhere near the area where they now found themselves. Drab as it was and certainly failing in parts - like most of the old infrastructure these days except for the most fortress-like environs - the building was certainly vastly larger inside than its exterior belied.

Now they entered down a hallway with no discernible doors upon its sides, even the small bluish lights becoming more and more sparse. Far ahead they began to see what looked liked harsh white light - like an electric arc trapped and pulsing ever the more violently because of its imprisonment - and from within that light they began to hear the familiar strange music that indicated that the commandant's cult recruiters were within.

These songs were old songs - or at least old contextually in the seventy-some years since the nuclear wars had culled billions of human lives from the planet in that great cleansing that had left the skies even now swirling with weather patterns indicative of a doom

inhuman, swirling grey and black clouds and whirlwinds, the light of the sun still only a sickly filament of what it had once been.

Some believed that the commandant's cult had been contrived, manufactured many years post the fact, as some doubted that the commandant herself was in fact the embodiment of that nuclear death that had changed the world irrevocably. Such doubts however, such misgivings, meant little to nothing at all when it was the ripping, tearing spearhead of her belief which raged campaigns of martial domination, brainwashing and servitude under the most blasphemous conditions imaginable for those which fell under the sway of her adherents and in those demographics where her name was known. The situation may have well been different in other far-flung locations of what was formerly known as the United States, perhaps far different to an even greater degree in areas even more remote beyond their shores, however the ground had been leveled and in the new regime of earth that which was local had become the scope of what counted as total reality for those situated within such environs - those inhabitants within a new Dark Age as it were and perhaps similar in this respect to the Dark Ages which had come before it far back within the mists of antiquity. Yet none of those periods were as dark as the present.

The electric-arc light came into closer relief as the internal security personnel hurried their charges along the corridor growing ever closer to the entrance. Britta visibly resented the reception that they had been given,

in her mind not at all befitting the entrance due to her and her sister ruler entering their soon to be new lands on the very onset of war. Bluebird in her thirteen-year-old and ordeal-seasoned perspective was not so unyielding, for she knew to a greater degree the modus operandi of both the commander's organization and the commandant's cult and she had expected - albeit dreaded - the fact that the night before the violence against the sovereigns commenced would not only be not restful in the normative sense but designed, for them, to effect profound psychological manipulation, designed for unknown induced cruelty by their handlers in order to foment all the more profound cruelty in their own psycho-physical makeup to be applied on the bleak morning to come.

Several yards from the open entrance for a few moments the light emanating from within became so intense that the internal security personnel had to shield their eyes momentarily before it receded despite the dark lens upon their masks, the future leaders whom they guarded left to squint painfully without succor. After, having led the girls through the doorway as instructed, they withdrew - departing along the same route that they had arrived and leaving Bluebird and Britta to discover what awaited them across the threshold.

Directly beyond the doorway was a black metal platform and two sets of stairs which led down into a large chamber with a bare concrete floor but covered in some portions here and there and to the sides with bland utilitarian carpets. The area was relatively large - a former loading dock more than likely given the large bay

doors upon the far end, now closed, and the smaller service entrance beside it. The light they could see now was originating from an electrical generator of industrial strength and manufacture, a high-powered model rigged with no small amount of creative tampering and connected to various other ancillary devices betwixt which bluish white electrical current arced violently and with regularity. Further such arcing could be observed in addition from one corner of the dock area where a large metal cage had been installed - ten feet in height and perhaps over twenty feet in its length and breadth and constructed of high-tempered steel. Both of the girls were well familiar with these type of structures from their tenure back at the commandant's training center, such human-sized cages having been utilized for extra-secure holding areas during the commander's headquarters former pre-nuclear war period as a high security penitentiary and similarly utilized as well after the commander and the organization had taken up residence there.

From her vantage point still atop the stairs, Bluebird could spy two naked figures within the cage cowering against one corner and then another as several internal security members berated them from all sides - some climbing on top the cage on all fours like some sort of horrific arachnids in pursuit of immobilized prey with sadistic abandon. In the hands of these internal security personnel were held long metallic prods attached to plasticine black handles and out from those black handles extended cords that led back to the main generator. For a moment the metal prods would seem to

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be nothing more than they first appeared to be, fixed batons, but then in an instant they became covered in blinding light and began emitting the unmistakeable burring of high-voltage electrical current. With regularity the internal security members would attempt to prod the naked bodies of the two captives when their instruments were in the latter state, shocking them in actuality only intermittently yet always keeping the threat of shock instant and immediate. One of the victims whimpered pathetically as they scurried from one side of the cage to the other attempting to avoid the captors which assailed them from all sides while the other was apparently too far gone for any sound of protest whatsoever - haunted eyes darting to and fro, attempting in vain to read some pattern in the movements of the black-masked organizational personnel stationed outside the cage.

On the other side of the area a throng of the commandant's cult recruiters, female to a person, stood huddled in an intensive conference amongst themselves, their whip-thin yet exceedingly violent figures possessed of the mood of potential carnage that could be realized at a sudden moment's notice and wrapped each and every one of them in their customary flowing black robes which made the gathering appear like a murder of crows or a wake of vultures. Upon the girls' entrance upon the ramp above them one of their number turned about ever so slowly, a pale face and eyes shining with maniacal fanaticism staring up and then beckoning at the two with an emphatic gesture, an invitation to descend.

Britta reacted with an instant and unbridled enthusiasm - a familiar sigh escaping her mouth as she ran down the flight of the stairs toward the cult recruiter, all of the latter's number now with their attention riveted on the two arrivals. Britta recognized this woman and always would, for this member of the commandant's cult in particular had been one of those who had taken her on that fateful morning after her time as the concubine of the Field Marshal - it had been she who had transported Britta on the long lonely country roads through the forests and rolling hills toward the commander's headquarters where Britta's destiny had ultimately been decided and sealed.

In less than a minute Britta had descended the stairwell and flung herself into the outstretched and awaiting arms of the cult recruiter - the rest of their number save one eliciting varied sounds of delight and muttered oaths commensurate to their cultus, for each breath and utterance were considered sacred and dovetailed to the purpose of their infernal mother, their goddess of nuclear death before and impending nuclear death to come.

Britta jumped into the awaiting arms of her friend and straddled her, small arms flung about the black-robed body and lithe legs encircling the woman's emaciated albeit hideously muscled waist. The cult recruiter reciprocated in kind, cradling the nine-year-old little girl's back through the chemical retardant rubberized fabric and reaching one wayward hand beneath the frock, caressing young legs and enticing posterior, both still bearing the telltale welts of having

undergone intensive trauma-induced programming on the receiving end of numerous paddles, straps and canes of divers construction at the hands of any number of high-tier organizational programmers. Britta cooed at the cult recruiter's touch and the cult recruiter reciprocated further with further more emphatic and even more obscene physical molestation.

"Dear, dear little sister!" the cult recruiter whispered into Britta's ear, the tonality and depth of her voice bearing a nearly inhuman timbre, one eye gazing into the shorn head of her charge, the other cocked upward and glaring malignantly at Bluebird whose white-sheathed body, in stark contrast to all those others black-clad, excepting the naked thralls within the cage, stood rigid and unmoving, imperious and still situated upon the upper ledge of the stairwell.

As Britta's reaction had been one of enthusiasm and combined mania, lust and affection in some horrible witch's brew equal parts confusion and elation upon seeing the cult recruiters, Bluebird had reacted with a sneer and a sense of definite and unmistakeable revulsion. Whilst the rest of the recruiters clapped and exclaimed at the reunion of the one cult recruiter and her prize recruit, that barbaric creature named Britta, one of their number stood still and had met her gaze with a sinister look of caustic threat to match her own – yes, this one Bluebird well recalled.

There was a power play at hand and no mistaking - for the outlying areas were under her dominion, Bluebird's dominion - her cult there, in new grounds, in a land that

had been slowly bled but which was to bleed further in gallons upon gallons - hundreds, thousands - to suffer under poisons the like that the post-nuclear world knew not, in order to flourish. Yet the commandant's cult recruiters - like unto ravening vultures - were there to make their imprints even as the hour drew late - in those crucial few minutes before midnight during which she should be consolidating her own power, not being dragged through her own regional command post like some half-rate shill to be ushered into the presence of these insufferable harpies.

Had she, Bluebird, grown megalomaniacal in the interim since she had been appointed to this joint administrative position along with her little sister - her little sister not by any biological connection but rather chosen for her by the auspices of the commander's organization and the commandant's cult - joined together by dint of their shared ordeals and fused through their shared suffering but more importantly by their shared authority promised to them? Did she wish to feed upon those who had fed her but also fed upon her as well?

It was no wonder really, in consideration of the types of programming she had undergone to position herself at the cusp of the domination which would come upon the morrow. All knew that the sovereign's defenses were non-existent, all within the organization except the most misinformed knew that what was to come was a ritual sacrifice - a mechanism by which the terror of the organization could be demonstrated. An experiment. A test. Yet, still, the political and territorial dividends were very real. Here was an area that had been allowed to

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exist for decades, unmolested - perennially bereft of the black hand of the commander and his hordes despite the fact that it lay directly upon the borders. And, surely as salt, the commandant's cult recruiters were here to stratify and consolidate their own authority on the mission even before she herself had participated in the initial steps of campaign to claim the land on behalf of the organization.

Fingering the leather nursery strap which was attached to the white nylon utility belt about her thin waist conspicuously - she and the cult recruiters on the floor beneath her knowing well that it was a direct replica of the commandant's herself and that she alone possessed such a model - Bluebird began to make her descent, clipped, slowly, down the flight of stairs.

Britta had detached herself from the cult recruiter by that point, oblivious both to the cult recruiters and Bluebird, and ran with abandon toward the metal cage on the other side of the converted warehouse - the internal security members in her path parting and creating a corridor so that she could approach the grates directly, the personnel stationed on the back and crawling on top of the cage still triggering their electrical prods with regularity, the internal security members closest to Britta wisely demurring.

Upon arrival at the cage she hung her fingers through and cackled as she stared at the two naked figures scuttling about on all fours. By dint of the fact that the threat of the electrical prods were now coming from all sides except that side where Britta was stationed the two

figures invariably began to make their way toward her side of the cage. Instantly Britta recognized the emaciated figures and squealed with glee - for they were none other than Nadezhda and her own very special pet, Private Bonn, the victims of a sophisticated double-cross and an even more sophisticated behavioral modification program engineered by the highest echelons of organizational intelligence.

As instantly as Britta had recognized her and Bluebird's shared slaves Nadezhda and Bonn recognized the youngest of their captors that stood before them and supplicated themselves upon the floor of their cage, lying upon their own filth in the process. Britta cooed with delight and extended two fingers through the grates as Bonn rose upon scarred knees supporting a tortured and emaciated body and began kissing her fingers and then slowly taking them within his mouth, betwixt parched and ulcerous lips, sucking upon them softly.

"Oh, my sweet little pet!" exclaimed Britta with a delight unabashed and genuine, her young voice disturbingly hoarse and goblin-esque. The young shock trooper's eyes looked up at her and lolled in ecstasy before closing and suckling at her fingertips with renewed vigor.

"Don't bite now, little pet, or we shall have to punish you most severely!"

Britta drew her fingers back from Bonn's pursed mouth suddenly - examining them carefully and then eying the devastated physicality of Private Bonn with one eyebrow cocked mischievously - his own milky gaze

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Across the way, Bluebird had now made her descent into the staging area which she surmised would be their immediate residence before their departure outward bound for the campaign on the morrow. The loading bay area, the presence of Nadezhda and Bonn and the specific numbers of internal security present - alongside lockers stationed in the corners that indicated weaponry storage units - all indicated that her assumption was the correct one.

The cult recruiters were now all eyes on her - they had relegated Britta's brisk departure for Nadezhda and Bonn's holding area appropriate and appropriately supervised given the fact that the captives were behind high-temper steel, the only opening gate stationed on top of the cage (the prisoners had been lowered in and upon extraction would be lifted out) and more than half a dozen internal security personnel being more than enough to mind one little girl - albeit one undeniably psychotic.

Though the cult recruiters, along with their attache retinue of internal security, had been assigned their place as the "welcoming committee" for the incoming future deities of the outlying areas - though their instant purpose was to be welcoming only in the most perverse martial sense of the word - they themselves were unaware of the degree by which the girls had been manipulated - psychologically, behaviorally and even physically altered - in the interim period since they had

been introduced to their coming destiny on the overlook of the commander's parade ground and now. For after that fateful meeting betwixt Bluebird and Britta - with the cult recruiters as the minders - sooner than it seemed they had been whisked away from the presence of the cult and taken into the custody of elements within the organization so fell in nature and so high-tier in security level that the cult recruiters, they themselves direct plenipotentiaries of the commandant herself, knew neither the means nor methods employed - nor the depths to which the scalpel of the organization had dug into their minds.

Bluebird glanced across the floor of the warehouse briefly at Britta and the traces of a sardonic smile crossed her face - though she was careful to hide it from the cult recruiters who would be her immediate concern. Those black-robed acolytes of the commandant who wept under images of red glowing mushroom clouds, who sang songs praising her horrific nature and machined layers upon layers of ritualism and subterfuge in furtherance of her cult in conjunction with their hidden counterparts in organizational intelligence, yet were the same who now looked upon their nine-year-old charge across the way as a child still to some degree. Bluebird knew what Britta had endured in the final months of preparation at the commander's headquarters, for she had been there with Britta - at least in part.

It was clear that the cult recruiters would immediately attempt to draw a wedge between Bluebird and Britta once in the new territories and utilize their sickly distortions of maternal affection against the

younger in order to make Britta the fifth column for the commandant's cult recruiters in the new regime. At this point anything was possible, yet they perhaps were unclear of the nature of the walking time bomb they had at their fingertips - as such they needfully must tread very lightly and very carefully, lest the decidedly volatile ordnance explode suddenly and without warning.

Bluebird returned her attention to the cult recruiters, the larger number of them who now spread out across her path in an unmistakeable posture of intimidation - though almost every one of them wore a sickly painted-on smile like a porcelain mask. Looking closely at most of them Bluebird could see small, almost imperceptible trickles of sweat dripping down from their foreheads along with a slight dilation of the eyes, slightly bloodshot. The cult recruiters were most assuredly heavily dosed with one of the nastier cocktails of stimulants coming down from organizational intelligence and issued mostly to certain of special detachments of internal security and shock troop squads attached to black ops missions, the sort of very specific stimulants which were assigned for those engaged in the most egregious violations of human rights executed in the most obscene fashions, requiring a high level of energy, maximum aggression and intensive paranoia, sometimes laced with hallucinations.

A cold sweat of her own broke out then upon Bluebird's brow and the cult recruiters laughed near in unison, grimly, sadistically. Behind where the vast number of them stood Bluebird could ascertain that two large chairs

were being brought into the staging area that had been arranged for their arrival - set near to each other across from a large mirror upon the dead center of which was present a life-size propaganda image of the commandant and arrayed on all other sides with various bleak banners of some of the organizational detachments which would be participating in the campaign upon the morrow. Each one of them indicated beyond a shadow of a doubt that those entities who bore such banners counted themselves as being repositories of a devastating darkness and it was that devastating darkness which they intended to spread upon the land under the guiding hand of the commander's martial genius. Most of them were set upon fields of black, some upon red - the color of bloodshed and explosive, reigning fire. A few of them were rendered in sickening hues of yellow or green - indicating organizational detachments involved in the development and deployment of poisons as well as chemical and radiological warfare. Bluebird and Britta's own personal crests were not set among them Bluebird noticed, both to her chagrin and rising alarm.

"We are so pleased to finally have you with us, Bluebird, and such a big day for you upon the morrow! And aren't you and your young friend exhausted from the long trip here - yes - and needing some sustenance, correct?"

A particularly witch-like cult recruiter spoke to Bluebird, the tone of her voice exuding a clear condescension which Bluebird found highly offensive yet also trilling with the effects of the stimulants which

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all of the witches seemed to be dosed on save for a few. The one cult recruiter who had been eyeing Bluebird as she had descended a few moments before eyed Bluebird still, standing near to the spokeswoman of the company, an infuriating smirk set upon a cold, pale face that could have belonged to a member of the aristocracy in years long past.

Bluebird assumed a pleasant-enough smile but looked not at the spokeswoman but at the cult recruiter who stood beside her.

"We consumed more than ample provisions along the road, though we would certainly be willing to share any fare that you may be able to offer - Britta we are sure is certainly hungry."

Bluebird's words were clipped and polite, yet she knew that the odds were stacked against them and that whatever was coming would not, could not be avoided. She glanced in the direction where Britta had been sporting near the cage and noticed that the glow of the electrical prods had ceased though the electrical arcing of the generators and other sundry apparatus was proceeding as violently as ever with an even somewhat increased regularity. When the electricity arced she could see Britta flitting here and there betwixt numerous of the black-masked internal security members, her frock flapping behind her, eyes as maniacal as ever.

The most visibly aggressive of the cult recruiters stepped forward and grasped Bluebird's chin in a vice-like grip and stared squarely into her eyes.

"The sustenance that you and that little will receive on this night will be of the sort that only the chosen of

the commandant are able to provide!"

Already large eyes grew larger and their bloodshot nature of the same came into clearer focus at the close vantage point which Bluebird was now afforded - the cult recruiter before her was clearly insane, the state of mind only amplified by the searing effects of the violence-inducing stimulants which churned within her brain and nervous system like angry wasps.

A hell would be endured during the long night ahead, for a hell to be created upon the dawn.

Three of the cult recruiters grabbed Bluebird then - laughing in their fell manner - divesting her of her garments and carefully so, especially with respect to the small cat-claws set upon the end of each of her fingertips. She acquiesced as they did so, internalizing a discomfiture which was only surely the beginning, filing away feelings that melded upon other festering wounds internal which turned into demons traveling along the neural pathways of her mind. A hand reached up under her auburn locks, filled with tangles and matted after days on the road on the way from the commander's headquarters, grasping the metal pull that drew down her back, unzipping her white vinyl garment. She cooperated, stepping out of the garment - another cult recruiter removing her small underthings and leaving her naked as she was led briskly toward one of the waiting chairs facing the mirror.

Two chairs were set ten feet out from the mirror and around fifteen feet from one another, in their reflection the propaganda image of the commandant inhabiting the

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central and shared focal point. They were of extremely heavy-duty construction, crafted from rough hewn seasoned wood well-aged yet still lightish brown in appearance, their sanded and polished beams held together with strong rivets and iron bands, not dissimilar to the electric chairs which had once been employed as a means of so-called humane death in that same land by the federal and individual state governments prior to the nuclear wars. In further similarity each of the chairs featured stout restraints positioned on the arm rests to bind the wrists, others situated to be stretched across the chest then fastened, others for the legs and the ankles. Though each of the chairs weighed much more than twice that of the physical bodies of any of the cult recruiters present, each had been picked up and draw across the area of short utilitarian carpeting by two cult recruiters each with no impediment - their wiry muscles stretching as they did so, amped up by the stimulants which they had been administered several hours before by organizational intelligence and in premeditation of the pastimes to which they would be privy as the night continued in which they would be taking roles as the aggressors.

Positioned on the center surface of both of the chair's seats were gleaming stainless steel probes, bolted onto the wood, several inches thick and wide at the base then gradually tapering off to a blunted point at the top. Bluebird stared - not at all unfamiliar with what was to come, though the combination of elements disturbed her nonetheless.

The three cult recruiters holding Bluebird, two at her

sides and one behind her with her hand on the nape of her neck, dragged Bluebird forward to station herself beside one of the chairs - several others departing across the way to fetch Britta while several more stayed to begin readying the apparatus for the night's coming ordeals.

From the direction of the cage on the other side of the warehouse Bluebird could hear the beginning of the inevitable conflict which she had already premeditated beginning apace - as Britta issued a loud and imperious protest against the cult recruiter's request for her to come with them, away from the area where her and Bluebird's pets, Nadezhda and Bonn, had been quartered. Britta's voice raised in ire was even more inhuman than when she spoke normally - the gravelly hissing bearing only faint resemblance to the deep, hoarse drawl that Britta spoke with when Bluebird had first met her in the anteroom to the observation chamber above the commander's parade grounds many months past. Over the course of their joint programming in the depths of the commander's training center Britta had been led down pathways of behavioral modification so horrifying and so technical that various aspects of her physicality had been sundered into multifaceted aspects, each with its own specifications and characteristics - the command mechanism voice in which she now spoke to the cult recruiters bearing nothing in similitude to the girlish squeals and coquettish invitations to delight of which she was also capable according to both circumstance and whim.

The cult recruiters who had been responsible for

arranging the staging area for the ordeal - both the physically strongest and those exhibiting the maximum in force and aggression - were called over to assist in rendering Britta away from the cage and to where the mirrors and the evil visage of the commandant's image awaited. As they stripped the black rubber garment up and over Britta's head, revealing the young and supple terrorflesh marked here and there in certain areas with the welts of past punishment sessions and the telltale angry scars of selective surgical procedures under the scalpels of the experimental medical sectors of organizational intelligence, Britta's voice reverted to girlish pleas of protest delivered with strange and disturbing deceptive overtones - interspersed with the growls of the overtly demonic. Bluebird smiled, as she noticed goosebumps involuntarily rise on the uncovered portions of the arms of the cult recruiters which held her as the struggle continued outside of her and their own range of vision. This night would be as much of a test for the cult recruiters themselves as it would for the girls.

Britta was finally brought over and stationed beside the second chair across from and to the left of the image of the commandant. As she was divested of her only remaining clothing, an obscene garment of shining black-leather cross-straps revealing barely budding breasts and a black thong of similar construction upon her lower half, Britta bared her feral yellowish teeth in a snarl with only the hints of sound emitting from her mouth.

Cult recruiters busied themselves with rubbing a

clear, viscous slime upon the shining metallic anal probes attached to the seat of the chairs, looking up at their respective charges coyly as they massaged the stainless steel objects with perverse delight, their eyes piercing and maniacal in their stimulant induced revery. Others among the commandant's cult recruiters dragged various electrical lines and small box-like apparatuses here and there around them - the thick black-rubber protected lines stretching across the cement floors across to the area where the bulk of the cult recruiters now stationed themselves. The air pulsed with the charge, like a rural field before a lightning storm.

After the cult recruiters attending to the chairs had finished their immediate work they snaked their way around the girls and the others among their sisterhood acting as their restraining guards, dipping their fingers into small containers of the viscous clear liquid and then reaching up to begin massaging the contents between the buttocks and into the pursed rectums of their young charges.

Bluebird allowed her legs to spread slightly and relaxed herself, shifting her waist slightly forward and allowing the slender fingers of the black-robed witches to insert one hard finger, then another, in a slow sensuous anal raping, knowing that those effecting such a molestation were doing so as a practical courtesy. If they had wished to be ungracious they could have as easily grasped her and lifted her down onto the awaiting probe with no notice. She herself had experienced far worse than that - so their added care showed that they were being cautious at least in the immediate - though

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the presence of the various generator-driven apparatuses which now surrounded her did little to set her mind at ease.

In contrast Britta began to struggle violently against her captors, snarling and lashing out and nearly biting the exposed arm of one of the cult recruiters who herself hissed mightily in return at the demoniac little child - speed-induced eyes peeled back in fury. A bevy of concentrated blows to the area around Britta's kidneys and she bent over involuntary to her intention, the controls of her mind betraying her. As soon as she was thus positioned several of the cult recruiters pounced, pushing her to her knees, her face mashed against the floor staring sideways and gazing crookedly at the image of the commandant where the image of the deity's feet were situated, black boots set authoritatively on the charred landscape of an atom-bomb ruined earth.

"Now we'll see how you like to take it forced, little beastling!"

With that one of the cult recruiters thrust three lubricated fingers into the little girl's rectum all at once, causing her to growl in protest. Several deep and pointed thrusts only as the others held her, then she was snatched up into sitting posture by her ears and three of the cult recruiters began to raise her up - two holding her beneath the thighs, spreading her legs and the other cradling her underarms. As much as she struggled and squealed in protest there was no stopping the cult recruiters as they raised her up and positioned her over the chair only then to lower her down - pushing her forcibly so that the metallic probe impaled her anally -

slamming her legs and arms into the proper positions, the padded and sewn leather of the chair's attached restraints quickly fastened and prohibiting all other further movement.

Once Britta was properly restrained Bluebird was also likewise situated, though with much less struggle. Sensing her compliance, only one of the cult recruiters was required to lead her by the arm before the front of the execution-style apparatus, Bluebird grasping the sides of the heavy-duty wooden armrests and lowering herself onto the metallic probe - only emitting the slightest grunt as the cold metal penetrated her, sliding and expanding into her lower entrails as her internal musculature gripped the foreign object and then enveloped it.

Once Bluebird had been thusly situated and strapped into the chair several cult recruiters approached, one of them pulling back upon her auburn hair and another forcing fingers into her mouth, opening it before placing a black rubber ball gag into the opening, lifting up her hair and fastening the attached nylon strap firmly before allowing her hair to fall back into place. Within minutes saliva began to involuntarily drip down her cheeks, sliding down her small exposed breasts and abdomen and pooling on her pale thighs and the overlarge seat of the furniture upon which she was restrained.

Again, effecting the same with Britta was harder and because of her defiance the cult recruiters were now being purposefully cruel and provocative. As her shorn head provided no similar means of manipulation two of the cult recruiters pulled the little girl's ears and laughed

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as they did so - another holding her mouth open by the chin while still another forced a ball gag into her mouth with unnecessary force. Both of the girls now fully restrained, it was time for the cult recruiters to go about the more pointed objectives of their exercise.

The cult recruiters busied themselves now with added energy, ignoring the girls, now rendered immobile and silent, as they moved various technical devices around the area. In the area where Nadezhda and Bonn were held inside their human-sized cage the bulk of the internal security personnel had departed for the night - only three were left, technicians who sat behind a large black table strewn with various control mechanisms bearing various knobs and dials manning the generator. Nadezhda and Bonn huddled against each other on the cold metallic grates of the cage's floor, rendered largely comatose for the night with a strong sedative administered via the auspices of a thick needle injected into the muscles of the thigh, their emaciated bodies seeking some warmth one from another. In the morning they would be wakened by another injection - this one carrying a heavy stimulant. Peering closely at Nadezhda it was evident that a small lump on her lower stomach indicated that the very early stages of a pregnancy might be underway - but only the medical teams attached to organizational intelligence knew for sure. Despite the internal security retinue present being very close to the executive levels of the new region and furthermore doing so in an inaugural and covert capacity, this particular project was still well beyond their security

clearance.

A metal grate was brought in and set between Bluebird and Britta and the image of the commander. The grate was set atop a large flat black object of natural creation, a very large piece of obsidian which had been brought in earlier, carried by the physically strongest among the cult recruiters present. As several of the cult recruiters busied themselves with stacking small logs upon the grate and building a small fire, one of the cult recruiters approached Bluebird and then Britta - her eyes were cold and clinical and possessed no sense of life within them, though they possessed the telltale bloodshot state of her sisters. Withdrawing a small, curved and exceedingly sharp blade from within her robes she lifted the blade to each of the girl's foreheads, making a minute incision and then reaching down and withdrawing a small amount of whitish powder from a small satchel attached to her side and rubbing it firmly into the wound, clotting the blood flow. As soon as this was effected Bluebird's eyes widened and then slumped into a dull thousand yard stare. Britta's eyes rolled back into her head showing only the whites of her eyes for several minutes as cold chills wracked her body, unnatural sweat emitting from each and every pore. After this had been effected the cult recruiter removed the ball gags from the girls as they would no longer be necessary after this point.

The cult recruiter who had made the incision leaned over and gazed into Bluebird's milky eyes.

"When the commandant comes and sees you, young one, she will be so very pleased."

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The cult recruiter's voice was slow, measured and without any discernible inflection and Bluebird heard each word as if it was echoing from thousands of miles away, passed along a wind. As her brain began to wrap itself around the concept of the cult recruiter's message Bluebird found herself smiling, her drugged eyes straining to raise themselves to meet those of the woman before her.

"Shush now, young one, shush, no need to extend yourself. Sit here and look into the fire and accept the dark blessings which the commandant is about to bestow upon you."

The cult recruiters with the various technical instruments brought several small black electrical boxes forward to the sides of each of the girls' chairs, unfurling small delicate wires attached to tiny needles which were carefully slipped into the skin atop the girls' hands - signaling here and there to the internal security technicians on the other side of the room to indicate that the mechanisms had been successfully installed without incident. One of the black-masked internal security technicians raised his hand in signal that he had received the command and slowly turned a dial on the device in front of him. The generator arced violently and charge ran through the electrical lines encased through the insulated black cords, making their way across the floor to power the small black boxes which began to purr appreciably. At the flick of a switch a visible electric blue current ran slowly upward along the silver strands of exposed wire then ran to the needles inserted beneath

the hands of the girls. Once making contact the girls' hands began to dance slightly, the fingers tapping without neural control upon the thick wooden armrests - the restraints disallowing any avoidance of the charge passing into their bodies via the auspices of the small needles. Their faces assumed grimaces yet no audible words could be emitted. Bluebird's mouth disturbingly assumed an almost perfect circular shape and a slight groan was audible for a few brief seconds as her eyes stared slightly sidewards into the small fire beneath the propaganda of the commandant, which enveloped the entire eight-feet of the glossy print in an infernal light.

Wracked for the first several minutes after the dosage of the white powder by internal visions beyond the scope of their immediate reality, the brief pulsing of the electrical shocks brought Bluebird and Britta into a state of half-life and the cult recruiters moved into the shadows beyond the light of the fire so that only darkness would be reflected in the mirror in the areas outside of the glow of the fire. The reflections of the girls themselves seated upon the chairs were slightly visible yet only in dim spectral fashion - made even more ghostly by the flickering of the flames and the effects of the drugs which caused their reflections to appear as shifting and amorphous, part of the surrounding shadow. Only the image of the commandant herself was lit in full - the base of the fire situated so that the feet of the commandant, in the image, depicting her booted feet standing upon a charred and sickly earth from the terra of which bloomed the image of a nuclear mushroom

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cloud which rose in destruction behind her figure - the widening cap of the blast framing her shoulders and head.

The depiction of the commandant - nearly photographic in rendering if not in actuality - oozed an atmosphere of black destruction, of the insane, of a force so devastating, so catastrophic that none could stand in its way. In the eyes of the two girls the image became much more than an image, it became alive - for their personal confrontation with her in the depths of the torture center was still fresh in their memory and indelibly marked in fiery impression upon their psyches, not easily ignored, not easily forgotten.

In their shadowy hiding places beyond the light the cult recruiters began to chant in unison, a slow funerary chant accentuated by the grim beat of small drums emitting a deep, somber tone. The sound was enhanced by the drugs, painfully mixed with the sound of the black boxes stationed near their side which in reality so soft became like the sound of whirlwinds swarming across desolate landscapes.

The image of the commandant came to life in the vision of the two girls as the chanting of the cult recruiters continued, the words of their devotional songs in praise of nuclear death personified seeming to roll over one another in a distorted audial tapestry. Yet, those words that melded together seemed to awaken the once stationary depiction of the commandant - she was alive!

A disturbing pulse had begun to emanate through the anal probe devices upon which each girl was impaled as the cult recruiters hidden in the surrounding

darkness began to activate the current that ran beneath the chairs to the metal inserts. They knew that the shock administered via that auspice, at that moment, would begin eliciting the hallucinatory confrontation which Bluebird and Britta were now experiencing - all of those present, save the internal security technicians, having undergone the same procedure themselves in the weeks leading up to the cusp of the campaign.

The cult recruiter medical personnel held a small pocket watch, meticulously maintained, and observed carefully as the minute hand reached the designated mark. She raised her finger and the chanting of her sisters stopped at once - leaving the space filled only with the low white noise of the electrical devices and the nearly imperceptible sound of the crackling flame.

Several of the cult recruiters crouched low upon the ground, their black robes trailing behind them as they slowly moved amplification devices beside the two girls' chairs, each one attached with small microphones that led to clips near the witch's mouths, from another portal of the amplification device a bifurcated wire apparatus with two small speakers that were inserted carefully into the ears of the girls. Neither Bluebird nor Britta noticed this operation, their attention riveted in the direction of the flames before them.

Before the girls stood the commandant - the ultra in cruelty - the ultimate and unquestionable despot possessing an authority rooted in the fact that she herself was responsible for the post-nuclear hell in which all survivors had dwelled and in which their descendants now inhabited. Though the nuclear wars had occurred

more than seventy years in the past she still walked upon the scorched earth - nuclear death personified - the commandant. She was beyond age and she was ageless and though her form seemed to possess some human characteristics the physical body she possessed was more humanoid than human. She was in all respects in both constitution and temperament a giantess - over seven feet in height though not an inch of that frame uncovered, her entire body completely enveloped within a shining black suit of skintight design - her face hidden behind a pointed black helmet constructed of fine mesh with one anonymous bar of horizontal black goggle lens concealing the eyes within.

The amplification devices which the cult recruiters had drawn up to the girls' chairs were designed to distort and conceal the voice of the speakers - in this case the voices of the two cult recruiters who were stationed beside the restraint chairs of Britta and Bluebird respectively. These two in particular as the trained operators in this procedure had undergone intensive briefings, orientation and instruction both by internal security technicians as well as the highest echelons of clandestine organizational intelligence. The words of the instructions which were to be given to the girls - each message custom to the recipient - had been drilled into them over hours - for if one mistake were made by the operators during the concourse of the procedure their lives would most certainly be forfeit, the end-game amidst other grim punishments which they would also endure should such an eventuality occur.

beyond the regional headquarters - into the area of the unconquered region into which Bluebird, Britta and a wide cross-section of the organization's military force would be penetrating now only a few hours hence.

A small filament of smoke began to inexplicably emanate from the extended finger of the commandant and then becoming a small cloud, iron grey and sootish black, which hung in the air. Within it could be seen the crackling of lightning and the sounds of millions of mechanical devices smashing and grinding into one another could be heard emanating from within. As the sound began its harsh rapport hot wet tears began to flow down Bluebird's freckled cheeks, for she knew that this sound was the voice of the commandant herself.

The grey-black clouds began to part slightly then and the light within them grew more pronounced - where the rent was made visions began to appear, cascading one upon the other at breakneck speed, yet Bluebird retained each one in its entirety - every aspect and import that was meant to be relayed by the commandant comprehended. In her visions blood spilled in waves upon waves, pools of blood in which the enemies of the organization drowned in abject despair. She saw her own martial forces, her units that marched beneath a pale blue flag bearing the black outline of a human figure from which expanded a starburst extending outward from an area between the heart and throat. She saw herself, radiant upon the back of an organizational tactical vehicle, standing aloft as winds carrying upon them spectral wraiths composed of yellow poisonous gas and before her alien figures, identities entirely obscured

inside hazardous material suits, spreading out over a ruined landscape filled with screams, sobs and faces that had begun to melt into themselves.

Both of the girls' visions slowly faded to black and fitful sleep came upon them. As the embers of the fire beneath the propaganda image of the commandant began to burn low the cult recruiters softly and quietly moved about the two platinum graduates of the commandant's training center. The needles and wires were removed from their wrists, restraints undone and their naked bodies gingerly lifted up, withdrawing them from the metal inserts which had penetrated them. Small beds had been prepared, beneath the ever-watchful image of the commandant, and the two naked figures were wrapped in rough-hewn blankets and allowed to rest, if only for a few hours. Outside of the bay doors of the loading area a reddish-orange sun began to rise from behind the heavily wooded hills of the border region and somewhere in the rebel territories a cockerel began to crow, the unknowing herald of a bloody dawn.

CHAPTER 2

When Bluebird and Britta awakened they found that they only had filaments of memory of the night before and the events that had transpired since their arrival at regional headquarters. They remembered arriving and Britta remembered having had the pleasure of seeing her slave Bonn, her man pet, who was to be mated to Bluebird's female pet, Nadezhda, in due course. The large bay doors of the loading dock had been opened and the full light of an early winter morning poured in illuminating the chamber. There were no signs of the torture chairs which had been removed by the cult recruiters several hours before, the recollections of those apparatus within the girls' minds having been completely subsumed by the hallucinations of the commandant and the instructions which had been inlaid into their subconscious minds via the auspices of the programming devices to which they had been subject. The lockers in the corners of the room were now flung open and weapons were being dispersed to various persons along a line of internal security personnel who passed them person to person in a human chain which proceeded out the smaller service door and beyond the girls' vision.

Bluebird arose first and awoke her counterpart, her

lieutenant from here on out, whom she affectionately referred to as her little sister - a nomenclature which the cult recruiters and intimate members of their retinue during their time in the commandant's training center had picked up on. Britta's eyes fluttered ever so gently as she came to waking consciousness, sitting up and allowing the crude military-style blanket to fall down and pool about her waist, revealing a hard core, small barely budding breasts and thin but extremely strong and wiry arms. Bluebird smiled at the sight as she smiled at the younger girl's shorn head - skinhead fashion - she herself only aware of the latter term from the books she had read about the times before the nuclear wars whilst acting in her duties as a den mother back at the commandant's training center. Britta had insisted on that particular fashion move herself - believing it to embrace barbarism, a sign that her religion was terror.

Britta arose fully and stood beside her older counterpart, both of them naked, no sign of their ordeal the night before though they both felt a strange itching upon the upper parts of their wrists where the medical personnel's needles had been inserted and a low ache from the intermittent electrical shocks in their innards and central nervous systems.

The cult recruiters surrounded them slowly, now loving, now sweetly motherly rather than provocative, leading them to a small area walled off with partitions beyond the sight of the internal security personnel and other organizational personnel who busied themselves with readying the tactical elements of the shared mission to come.

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Behind the partition two young female members of the commandant's cult awaited, an attendant for each of them. They were exceedingly sweet in appearance and demeanor, Bluebird could ascertain that they were acolytes immediately upon apprehension - adherents of the commandant's cult who had yet to be initiated in full into the ways and pathways of the commandant's monastic order, probates. Bluebird smiled at the aspiring nun who approached her who wore her own hair, auburn like Bluebird's own, shoulder-length and who was around the same age as herself. An angelic looking blonde had been tasked to Britta, the modicum of softness in Bluebird's opinion - probably the daughter of a high-ranking organizational member in one of the more cerebral operational areas. Bluebird stifled laughter as a look of sudden alarm crossed the blonde's face as Britta croaked a greeting in her hoarse voice before switching to a syrupy sweet affectionate tone and then reverting to her standard rural hiss as she took the blonde's arm in friendship but with considerably more force than perhaps was necessary.

Bluebird's minder led her to one side of the partitioned space and assisted in dressing her - Bluebird's lithe limbs stepping into the white vinyl suit and the young acolyte zipping her up from behind, the revealing fabric contouring with automatic reaction to every curve of Bluebird's slender form as she did so. A protective tubular garment of a somewhat scratchy and rough woolen construction was pulled onto and positioned upon the lower parts of each limb then again

upon the lower arms and wrists - the acolyte then facilitating Bluebird stepping into her boots of similar visual aesthetics of her bodysuit, the appearance of which blended in seamlessly with Bluebird's main garment. The acolyte fitted Bluebird into a pair of tight long white gloves, a new addition and also in appearance seamlessly integrated with the rest of her visual presentation. Bluebird herself fitted her fingers, now over the covering of the gloves, with the individual claws upon each fingertip to whose presence and use she had become well accustomed, as the acolyte tied Bluebird's auburn locks back in a tight bun designed for functionality rather than appearance. A fabric tube of the same woolen construction that had been fitted onto her lower limbs was now stretched carefully over the head and allowed to retract covering Bluebird's neck and lower chin. The young cult recruiter brought over Bluebird's white nylon utility belt which Bluebird herself fastened about her small waist, then clipping on the nursery strap to the side via the auspices of a small carabiner.

Leading her a few steps toward the corner of the partitioned area with a humble gait, the acolyte brought Bluebird forward to where a black metal box was set upon a somewhat larger wooden crate, the side of which was stamped with an emblem that read "ENGINEERING CENTER."

"This was made especially for you, mistress," the young acolyte said as she opened the box and withdrew a curious item which on inspection was a helmet designed specifically for Bluebird herself. On immediate

inspection she could see that it possessed a not dissimilar shape to that of the commandant's, including the particular and curiously fashioned peak at the top. Unlike the commandant's however, her helmet was white, the color as pure and unblemished as a winter snow and fashioned of a hard amour-like plastic, the secrets and properties of which had no doubt been learned by the teams at the engineering center from the latest military technological manuals in circulation directly before the time of the nuclear wars. The helmet possessed no markings and no visible openings near the mouth except two very small and nearly unnoticeable ventilation holes covered with small screens that led to a small but functional series of interior tubes - the helmet designed to protect from poisonous gases as well as contusions. Across the area of the eyes there was a single lens, by the book organizational standard, except that hers shone with a completely mirrored platinum glare. Looking carefully at Bluebird as she examined this item which had been machined especially for her, the young cult acolyte could tell that her young mistress was pleased.

A helmet for Britta, in addition to possessing the functionality of Bluebird's own, had also been additionally machined to resemble the face of a demon - the material rendered in black and vaguely tetrahedral in shape replete with inlaid fangs, though stationary and non-functional, indicative of one who delights in the taste of human flesh and the drinking of human blood. In the area of the mouth were two tusks protruding from either side as well - their particular inclusion and design

having been culled from research of organizational intelligence, understanding that their presence indicated both inclusion among the numbers of the demonic races of antiquity in certain regions as well as, in a feminine context, being among the number of wrathful goddesses whose propitiation could only be effected by rights of horror, bloodshed and sacrifice. One black lens for vision across, not dissimilar to that of the helmet of the commandant herself, yet Britta's in distinction possessing and reflecting purple highlights especially when exposed to light.

Beneath she was attired similarly as before except that large black rubberized gloves covered her hands and lower arms, of a grade construction rated for handling contaminants, with black boots designed for combat environments with soles also specially rated for exposure to chemical contaminants and corrosive matter upon her feet. The rest of the familiar elements were present - obscenely revealing black leather and shining straps highlighting the minute exposed breasts, the black leather strap of likewise design barely covering her genitalia and set betwixt her near fully exposed buttocks. Rather than the shining straps set only upon her naked flesh as before, however, Britta first been fitted into a sheer rubber-like bodysuit, completely clear and showing her flesh beneath in full aspect, as she walked the suit clear suit eliciting a sadistic creaking.

"Fetch me my lead, fetch my leash!" Britta snarled, before letting loose with a peal of hideous laughter. She could not wait to play with Bonn, her pet, and despite the fact that she was delighted by the additions to her kit

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- she had insisted on putting on the helmet right away - her mind had quickly gone to her servant from whom she had been separated for some many weeks now during her special ordeals in the depths of the commandant's training center. She often remembered how she had so enjoyed torturing him that fateful day in the halls of the commandant herself, under her bleak and horrible gaze, and she yearned to torture him again.

The girls were led out from the partitioned area, the assigned probates carrying each of the girls' respective helmets (the young blonde acolyte, despite undeniable fear at attempting to convince her very volatile charge, had managed to separate Britta from the helmet at last - trading the helmet for the chain and leather lead which had been fetched from one of the lockers).

Harsh winter sunlight flooded into the area of the loading docks now, the huge dual doors opened wide and letting in the weather, still warm for this time of year, in the mid forty-degree Fahrenheit range and slight breezes stirring the air intermittently. Britta looked toward the cage but Nadezhda and Bonn were nowhere to be found - the iron grate of the ceiling opening flung open and a large team of black-masked internal security personnel in conference off to the side, huddled about in a circle.

Beyond the doors of the loading area stood the largest assembly of organizational forces that either of the girls had ever seen - larger than what Britta herself had witnessed in the border camp during her time as the concubine of the field marshal and larger than the

massed forces which had been present on the parade ground months past when Britta and her older sister had been presented with the inaugural sight of their own personal units.

Immediately before the doors of the loading area were two large armored tactical vehicles - modified considerably over the years and waiting in the wings for just such an occasion in which their potency for lethality would be tested on the field of battle. Both were painted in a flat black - both bearing the light blue human starburst flag of Bluebird's unit in enamel upon the driver's side doors. Greased fifty caliber gun barrels thrust out from both sides of the fronts of the vehicles, their controls remote and operated internally, promising a nasty and violent death for those who might be so unfortunate to find themselves in the metal jacketed spray of their payloads. The back of the vehicles carried two more machine guns fashioned on small circular turrets which had been welded onto either side of the rear of the vehicle which served in main purpose as troop carriers. Each of these to Bluebird's interest carried not members of her or Britta's unit but rather black-masked internal security personnel, each armed to the teeth, with shock troopers wearing gas masks stationed on either of the rear gun turrets.

On the top of the cab of the vehicles the metal roof had been removed and replaced with an observation deck made of bullet-proof glass, a black padded bar stretched across the interior so that the backseat passenger could stand aloft to see and be seen during the conflagration to come.

The most telling aspect of the vehicles however was upon the hood over the engine block - for both Nadezhda and Bonn had been strapped across the hoods of the respective vehicles - both of them nearly naked still except for small breathing apparatus that had been inserted into their mouths and nostrils, held tight with adhesive with small tubes that ran back through interior passageways into a filtering device within the cab of the vehicles maintained by one of the internal security personnel.

Nadezhda's skeletal form was attached to Bluebird's vehicle - chained in an obscene sitting position, her legs spread - her legs and arms held back with restraints locked in place across the grate of the radiator. The vehicles were even now already running - indicating that the forward move into the sovereign's territory was nigh - and the scalding hot water from the radiator sputtered onto her back, her screams muffled by the breathing device which also served as a sort of a gag not by accident but by design.

Bonn's position was even more astounding to view - the emaciated form of the shock trooper whose life had been irrevocably turned toward hell via the machinations of the commander's strategies now found himself bent over the front of Britta's vehicle and spread-eagled - his legs and torso strapped to a metal frame apparatus designed to move to and fro along a set line of motion in tune with the vehicle and a long thin metal cylinder extending from either side penetrating him rectally. Arms spread akimbo across the hot metal covering the engine, his face, also fitted with a similar

breathing filtration device as Nadezhda's, was positioned on a small metal frame welded onto the hood which forced his vision upward - toward the glass observation chamber where Britta would be visibly situated during the concourse of the coming campaign.

Beyond these death carriers stretched organizational forces far into the distance - Britta's unit closer to the vehicles and Bluebird's own near the front of the line, their bodies and identities completely obscured in their SCBA suits - bulbous and alien in appearance as they went about their varied preparations. Bluebird could see that other tactical vehicles, smaller than her and Britta's, pulled behind them the newly developed organizational rocket launchers - the backs of the pick-ups filled with multiple carefully cradled rockets fully loaded with payloads bearing the chemical and radiological agents which would soon find a home amidst the unsuspecting populace of the sovereign territories which would soon be her own territories.

The suspicions that she had felt upon her arrival at the regional headquarters still lingered despite the fact that the ordeals of the night before had for all effective purposes washed her brain as to certain doubts. Her regency over the area she had no doubt of - just as she had no doubts that her purposes here were streamlined with those of the commandant, the latter having been made especially clear in her confrontations with her before the flame on the chair of torture. That said however, as she watched the near thousand massed organizational personnel before her - the majority of them of her and her little sister's own

wondered to herself what area this was to be, what would be created here. The commandant had telepathically communicated to her various aspects of her rule to come to the point that in so many points where she had once been uncertain she was now clear - yet those visions had yet to blossom forth into a full reality. As she watched the alien-like figures in the SCBA suits go about their business however, not only tending to the launchers and the ordnance but also loading large steel drums of hazardous materials onto lorries - minute cracks in some of them already emitting foul greenish smoke, she felt that her area was to be a very special sort of hell on earth. She had seen visions of the immediate - she knew what she must do, but what would come after?

Already she knew that others within her unit - similarly attired in protective gear as those before her and similarly armed, though the rockets had not yet begun to fall - were already pouring similar steel drums of hazardous materials into the streams, into the rivers and onto the earth of the hillsides - the latter which would soak down and then pour into the valleys during the rains and further in the post-winter thaw several months hence when her administration would be in full flower. She had not been told about such activities but the commandant had transmitted these visions to her in real-time during her confrontation in the night - a pressure point of the goddess of nuclear death's perverse gloved finger upon her brow and all that had been hidden to her prior had been revealed. Bluebird saw visions of organizational personnel in secure areas of the

commander's headquarters sitting at conference, faces uncovered, cruel faces one and all, laughing maniacally - a flag of the commander's own personal crest on the wall behind them. She saw others - these their identities hidden - black ops units - pouring canisters of toxic liquid metals into the wells of all who lived within forty miles beyond what would be the new border. Prion poisoning, turning the land foul. She saw animals on what remained of the old farmsteads stagger and die - bloodied suppurations blossoming forth in chilling designs upon their bodies, reddish froth emanating from their mouths. And so it would be with the children as well - and generation unto generation after, should mother nature attempt to heal herself the organization would rip open the wound once again in a dangerous downspiral which perhaps even the commander himself knew not where it would end. Evil walked the land and she was to be the spearhead.

Their cult acolytes called Bluebird and Britta to an area directly outside the loading docks, through the small service entrance and down a pair of well-worn concrete stairs to a large slab where a plastic barrel and pump mechanism had been arranged, the slab wet with bluish liquid from which a harsh antiseptic smell emanated that permeated the air around it. One after another throughout the long morning even before dawn when both of the sisters were sleeping and dreaming unsound dreams of the commandant's design the members of the girls' units had been going through the process - suiting and being thoroughly sprayed with the substance inside the barrels, another barrier between

them and the poisons which they were about to disperse.

A member of Bluebird's unit stood manning the apparatus and signaled to the cult recruiter acolytes to prepare the two girls. With the girls' leave their respective helmets were placed upon their head and they were directed to stretch their arms outward. First Bluebird and then Britta were sprayed with the substance front and back and then stepping beyond the slab the acolytes carefully cleaned the lens upon the helmets. Their skintight attire dripped with the chemical liquid but quickly dried in the wintry air which was mostly devoid of moisture at that time of year. The chemicals would add another layer of protection for the girls and the rest of the organizational forces, should some part of their suits be compromised. It was the commander's wish that organizational losses be kept to a minimum in the conflagration to come.

The acolytes led them now to their respective vehicles, explaining to them how the respiratory apparatuses inside their helmets functioned and triggering small buttons on each which activated an amplification device so that they could be heard. The amplification device turned their voices somewhat strange, somewhat robotic and managed to make Britta's own voice, disturbing in the best of circumstances, even more full of horrific portent.

Bluebird reached out her hand and clasped Britta's own lightly, careful not to allow the cat-like apertures upon her fingertips to touch Britta's glove.

"This is it, my little sister, the time has arrived in which we shall inaugurate the precursor to our rule."

Britta stared up at Bluebird, the contours of her sheathed body snow-white and immaculate, the chrome vision lens of her helmet glaring harshly under the doom-laden light of the morning - a day that promised many things, but ruin beyond all else.

"The commandant showed me so many things, sister, so many things that will take place now - and even more for later! Bluebird, did she show you also?" Britta's voice, amplified and distorted through the device within the helmet, dripped with bloodlust - slavering for the kill and slavering for the tortures which would be afforded to her, her perversely exposed body tense with expectation.

Bluebird nodded her assent but before she could proffer an answer a great tumult arose - a barked order by a drill master upon the lip of the loading dock followed by others throughout the ranks in relay fashion on down the line. The roar of myriad engines erupted, black polluted smoke belching into the air angrily from the exhaust of the varied military vehicles - the roar from the converted troop carriers designed for the two girls emitting the most painful roar of them all.

The acolytes had now melted into the background, making their way back into the warehouse area to stand with the other cult recruiters who stood within the half darkness of the enclosure - visible through the large bay doors - watching as internal security led the girls apart and assisted them into their vehicles.

Bluebird was lifted up into the back of the truck, walking through two rows of internal security who stood up from the bench seats facing each other to allow her passage - entering the cab of the vehicle through a small hatch in the back and then assuming her place within the bullet-proof observation enclosure, the back of Nadezhda's struggling head visible from over the lip of the hood.

Her hands grasped the padded roll bar stretched across the vehicle's observation chamber, booted feet firmly planted on the seat beneath, her cat-like claws digging into the padding as the vehicle lurched forward. Bluebird's gaze shifted to her left and there across from her, apace with her own vehicle behind a similar glass enclosure a flash of purplish light could be seen shining from the face of a demoness. The sisters were now on their way.

CHAPTER 3

Wendy had endured worse punishments, however the most recent suffered at the hand of the lieutenant had been exceedingly brutal even by his standards, and her body still ached in remembrance.

She and the lieutenant had delivered the chemical weapons to the commander's headquarters as planned after their marriage in the subterranean caverns of the Great Demon, Gaubni - the caravan consisting almost exclusively of members of his own personal retinue and a few minders from organizational intelligence.

They had moved slowly as they departed the mountainous region of the engineering center - the mist-shrouded treacherous ridges of dense woodland and ancient rock giving way to verdant valleys, dappled sunlight shining through the shimmering canopy of pines and their company finally entering into those slightly rolling lands that marked the beginning of the immediate area of the commander's stronghold.

Entering into the area surrounding the commander's headquarters was an unforgettable experience for Wendy, who had never left the area of the engineering center during the six years and some odd months of her young life. So secret and so secure was the work of the engineering center that those who lived there were

quarantined from the rest of the organization's populace as a matter of policy. They would be born, live, work and die within those dark mountains, never having been significantly exposed to any other demographic within the organization except the very seldom visitor - said visitors, such as the lieutenant, who were always and invariably of organizational high-tier and as such in their own way anonymous if not inaccessible - quickly about their business in the mountain region, quickly gone.

There had been no protest when Wendy had been taken outside of the area of the engineering center contrary to organizational policy - but unbeknownst to the lieutenant the organizational intelligence inserted in his retinue had radioed command intelligence apprising them of the situation via encrypted radio transmission. The dividends of which, or lack thereof, which were only to be known once they had arrived at the commander's headquarters but which Wendy was now only too painfully aware.

The trek into the area of the commander's headquarters was startling - for although the amoral and feral nature of the organization permeated the mountain fastness from which she had come there was nothing that could have prepared Wendy for the scope of the horror which displayed itself in the most overt and blasphemous fashions once in this region which was the epicenter of hell in the new post-nuclear world and from which hell emanated out toward all else.

As they made their way forward once well out of the mountains they traveled along a long roadway, old in design, once blacktop but now a singed crust of melted

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rock and man-made materials yet still maintaining a surface which provided a corridor of travel betwixt a large forest which loomed on either side. Before the nuclear wars this had been a highway that ran across the state as it then was - facilitating two cars abreast - a vector between one state and the next in the context of a political formation which no longer was in a land to which borders were now all but meaningless except in the context of those formed within the organization. And at that time Wendy was well within the borders of her kindred.

She walked some of the way though her small legs tired quickly in attempt to keep up with the adult members of the lieutenant's company, the lieutenant inclusive. When she tired he would laugh good-naturedly and pick her up, allowing her to ride on his shoulders for a further and wider view of the lands that awaited them - sometimes cradling her like a baby, his roving hands often caressing the contours of her black baby brigade uniform and his face sometimes bending toward her pale neck, covering her face and collarbone with kisses rough from beneath his thick black mustache.

Other times though, and these were in truth the times she enjoyed best, she would ride upon a small platform on the front of one of the supply wagons - sometimes propelled by mechanical methods but more often than not pulled along by multiple shock troopers, their muscled bodies sweating beneath the harsh grey light of the sky above, crude tattoos and ritual scars bearing insignias of their martial exploits, organizational cults to which they were beholden and with myriad

depictions of their own horrible proclivities rippling along strained flesh as they made their way forward - carrying the chemical weapons commissioned by the commander, a terrible burden.

As they drew closer to the commander's headquarters along the forest road Britta first noticed the appearance of strange figures either singly or in very small groups - ten at very most - usually three to four - who were sometimes seen emerging from the brownish treelines or sometimes already congregated on the straw and leaf-ridden shoulders of the road itself.

The first she noticed seemed to be an old woman in her estimation, in actual years only perhaps in her mid-forties yet weathered beyond years by dint of the oftentimes deadly nature of the post-apocalyptic landscape - gaping lesions on her face and a vacant nature to the eyes that indicated that her parents were more than likely born as infants in direct exposure to the radiation of the nuclear wars and that she herself had been raised in an area of particularly high contamination.

No hair upon her head, the lone woman raved in a gravelly voice as she pushed a cart before her, filled with the desiccated corpses of vultures and crows which she had collected along her travels as she moved from strange solitary base to strange solitary base, one to another, through the vast expanse of the forest which was formerly a national protectorate in the old days.

The organization had no interest in the great forest at the outskirts of its epicenter insofar as harvesting its

timber nor in policing it even in a titular manner. The wood that was needed for their own needs was much easier to be found closer to base in an area which was already as the case may be heavily wooded - if not procured from the more localized woods then sometimes culled from the old standing buildings of the time before, deconstructed by teams of trainee shock troopers and dispersed according to order and necessity. The great forest was maintained however insofar as it was left undisturbed as a border betwixt the more outlying areas from which the lieutenant, Wendy and their company had come. The areas closer to the commander's headquarters which consisted of mostly sweeping fields, former agricultural areas utilized to a great degree for fruit-bearing trees - the latter having long died to rot in any useful state, but which bloomed anew in those years long after those who had planted and maintained their seeds of origin had become long dead - bore more population as well as defensive outposts, but the greater forest on the perimeter was left as it was, a natural boundary and a secretive, liminal region for the more bizarre tendencies where the peripheral population of the area of the commander's headquarters were allowed to dominate.

From time to time organizational intelligence, covertly operating under the guise of cultists of new and horrific gods and bringing with them a plethora of practices toward just such new and horrific ends, would enter into the forest regions and liaison with some of the solitary black wizards and witches who dwelled there,

sometimes staying several days in one or several of the small communes of believers of varied cults that flourished in the area. The organization was the figurative eye in the sky, surveillance complete and inescapable through the hard and tried method of direct human intelligence, and through whatever means of deception and subterfuge the will of the commander would make its way into even the darkest corners of the territory under his control and slowly but irrevocably turn their will to his own.

While some of the strange practices that took place in the forest were organic to a degree, formulated by the lone lunatic who had received revelations born of madness in their solitude and misanthropy, more than half were directly manufactured behind closed doors in the secure areas of the commander's headquarters and then disseminated according to predetermined stratagems. The so-called social scientists of organizational intelligence - having borrowed a term from one of the dictatorial administrations existent prior to the nuclear wars - there, behind locked doors of iron and guarded by internal security personnel armed for maximum lethality, mapping out the new religions and designing whatever bleak deity was to administer said faiths with exacting and minute detail according to the carefully outlined strategic planning directives of the commander's organization for purposes of social engineering.

Wendy watched from her vantage-point atop the weapons carrier as a black-masked member of internal security jumped off from the personnel vehicle in front

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of her and approached the witch with her grisly payload, she who had up till then averted her eyes from the procession of organization personnel though her curiosity had been great. The small insignia patch upon the upper arm of the masked internal security member's tactical jacket, featuring the outline of a glowing orb surrounded by writhing vipers, teeth dripping with hallucinatory poison, indicated that he was a member of one of the liaison groups attached to a special intelligence sector.

The internal security personnel member made a brief but complicated series of hand signals toward the witch as she looked up, upon completion she in turn hissed in reciprocation, entirely feral in every filament of her sickly constitution. He then proceeded to toss a small bound parcel toward the witch which she bent down and picked up from the ground before her, the earth littered with the dead leaves of the autumn recently passed. The witch's eyes narrowed as she examined the exterior of the package and she hissed again, this time loudly and with more vehemence, causing several of the shock troopers to turn slightly in notice even as they continued their brutal work of pulling the weapons carrier forward.

Placing the parcel safely amidst the black wings of the slowly rotting fowl in her cart she raised a jagged finger to one side of her diseased face, dragging a filth-encrusted long and jagged yellow fingernail swiftly down across her papery skin and gasping as a slow trickle of blood began to form and then glide down her cheek.

Her eyes wide and burning with insane thoughts she

half-ran, half-hopped forward toward within several feet of the internal security member, crouching down upon the ground and scrawling several strange sigils upon the dirt then collecting some of the blood from her self-inflicted wound in the curve of her fingernail and flicking it downward, the red droplets visible in contrast to the light-colored sandy soil. She spat then, the groan of her failing lungs aching with the effort, upon the symbol which she had drawn and the special intelligence liaison reciprocated by making a small salutary hand gesture, several fingers aloft and several fingers crookedly bent toward her direction. The witch returned the sign and then grasping the rough wooden handles of her cart turned and departed back into the woods along a rutted natural path. The internal security member or one of like affiliation within special intelligence would be back, in one year's time, perhaps less, to observe and report on whether their seed had fallen on fertile soil and whether harvest of the same would soon thereafter be nigh.

Wendy observed many more such lone cultists under the sway of covert organizational influence while traveling through the great forest, some of whom made that corpse-bearing crone first encountered positively pale in comparison.

Along one winding area of the road she had seen through the treeline a ramshackle cottage made of harvested aluminum and deadwood set up against the rise of a gentle ridge. Tortured screams could be heard reverberating from inside that foul home and she never knew what exactly she had heard occurring within -

though she knew without a doubt that there was an arrangement, for as she watched the same internal security personnel attached to special intelligence made his way through the treeline in the direction of the screaming. She had turned her head in order to glimpse a view, the weapons carrier continuing on along its slow way and saw that as the internal security member approached within twenty to thirty yards of the home two men had stepped out suddenly from the treeline - guards - their bodies huge, hair long like that of women and the telltale signs of blood smeared upon their mouths. Once again, the internal security personnel made certain signs with his hands and as the witch had done those members of a cult unknown to Wendy reciprocated in kind - leading him toward and then inside the dwelling - the screaming become audibly louder during the brief window in which the internal security personnel entered before the door was shut behind him. What went on behind those closed doors? Wendy could only speculate.

CHAPTER 4

"Open your legs, little one!"

The child whimpered pathetically but the cult recruiter, a cruel woman in her thirties, attired like the rest in the large flowing bat-like robes that marked one as a member of the commandant's most faithful, short-shorn black hair uncovered, took no notice of the small boy as she continued her work.

She detested these little vermin, detested them. Her tastes ran to more mature, more matronly specimens of the feminine gender only - the little boys in particular, how she despised them! Yet, despite this hatred, her current assignment was not entirely without a silver lining - for the little one before her was being prepared for the sort of grim pageantry that would be both to the benefit of her nuclear death goddess and, without question, to the young boy's great misfortune.

Still recalcitrant she opened the naked child's legs by force, examining his genitalia briefly - yes, clean. No signs of sexual disease were present. The cult recruiters her senior did not want the little filth deflowering any of the smaller innocent maidens once inside the cage. Those latter demographic, those that survived, might be vetted into the commandant's cult itself - as probate sisters - if

not vetted toward the baby brigades within the commandant's training center and all that might entail. The examination process seemed somewhat unnecessary according to her own estimation, but who was she to judge?

"Cora Beth! Sister! Deliver him, the wagons are waiting at the threshold - don't make me demand your haste even in this simple matter!" shouted a puckered-faced cult recruiter near the doorway to the Quonset hut, long fingers thrumming in a sign of impatience - meant for her explicit viewing no doubt. The work environment had been hell as of late - the stressors of the upcoming event trickling downward along the chain of command and often settling like a storm upon the very heads of younger sisters such as herself.

Cora grunted her assent, her examination complete, and dragged the small boy up by his hair - his pubescent voice squawling in protest.

"Where did they find these insufferable little shits?" she wondered to herself. She smiled then, in answer to her own question. This one was more than like passed off by his parents - organizational members of lower to middling rank - who probably thought that his being passed over to the cult would afford him opportunities that they could not. Well, she thought, the boy could not be faulted for having the animal instincts to know that perhaps a more terminal fate awaited him - though he still might be lucky, should the foul hand of the commandant fall upon another.

A handful of his hair grasped in her fist, Cora marched him over to the door, past the senior sister who

did her best to look intimidating, thin arms crossed across her breasts, nostrils flaring. Cora felt like spitting on the ground in like kind, but knew better than to add flames to the fire at this hour of the day. Their work was almost over and meditations awaited - twenty minutes or less - a march of their sector, fifteen or so sisters, across the parade grounds that had been arranged outside of the walled compound to their new chapel.

Reaching the exit she flung the naked child toward the door, her small act of passing brutality a small act of defiance toward the senior sister. Before the boy was able to sink to his knees he was caught by two of the masked internal security members stationed directly outside - grabbed under the arms and lifted up and carried away at a pace so brisk it almost seemed as if they were running - bringing the potential sacrifice to the prison wagon inside of which other children awaited in fear and despair, winding out what could be the quickly diminishing balance of their lives.

Her task for the day done she made her way out on the heels of the internal security members, ignoring her senior sister who shouted after her for some attention to some mundane task or another. The probates would take care of that, cleaning up the piss of the children that was still pooled on the floor - she was sick of it for today, even though the coming event was one of unparalleled significance for the organization, even more so for the cult of the commandant. There she, her goddess, would make an appearance - and she lusted for that day - but she was still unsure if it was a ruse, a propaganda ploy, who could tell? Would the commandant really appear, or

was this a test of collective devotion? Her years as a cult recruiter had made her wary of any and all possible routes of potential deception, especially where mobilization of the general population was concerned. She had spent more than enough time in the organization and specifically within her own very insidious chapter thereof to become more than somewhat jaded about the ebb and flow of measures, counter-measures and alternate measures that were employed with ultimate merciless precision by organizational intelligence.

As she exited the metal building and made her way to the large vat to the side containing rain-water collection - not suitable for drinking in its decrepit container but suited enough for washing, at least by standards of a cult recruiter - she spied one of the intelligence members across the way, advising several of her sisters in a huddled impromptu conference as the case often was these days. The smug bastards. She did spit now, with emphasis, before making her way to the rim of the water container, though her object of disdain was well beyond noticing her yet again impotent defiance.

Cora stripped herself of her monastic garment, up and over her head and grasping with her left hand allowing it to drop unceremoniously at her side upon the dirt. The entire atmosphere in which she dwelt was filth - it was folly, in her estimation, to ignore that salient point. As she drew up the somewhat oily water and sluiced it over her face and then over her breasts, under her arms, across her breasts, genitalia and legs, she looked up into

the iron sky that shone above them. For the most part the firmament continued to be shrouded in cloud cover, though the strange eddies and churning clouds that she remembered as a youth had become less common. She laughed to herself, in remembrance of the various brats she had processed earlier during the day. Should they have been privy to the nature of the atmosphere when she was a child of like age they would have surely believed that they were living in a nightmare - not to mention that the organization during its more formative days was, in her reckoning, entirely more brutal than it was now - the burning will to power and need for dominance of the early, revolutionary days since being tainted. The organization as it now existed, seventy years since the nuclear wars and less than that in its actual formation was a hydra - horrific, yes - but corrupt beyond all belief.

Clean as she could hope to be for the time being Cora dried herself off with the hem of her robe before putting it on again. She kept a watch out from the corner of her eye but none had noticed her bathing, the other sisters elsewhere - not that they would necessarily be interested in the first place she thought to herself with no small degree of commiseration - as there were many more interesting sights to be had in these recent days for their lot than another witch of their number in a state of undress. As for the organizational men most of them chose to say at arm's length from the cult recruiters as the witches were rumored to practice mind control, a rumor not entirely unfounded. All the better for her, given her own proclivities.

Across the parade ground the sound of what seemed like innumerable small bells began to sound and from numerous directions the sisters began to gather - wild feminine eyes, opened wide in fanaticism, lips cruel and predatory and constitutions dangerous, deceptive and feral in nature. Although she could not see it herself Cora was among the younger of the cult recruiters one of the sisters most exhibiting that telltale aura of a seasoned member of the commandant's cult. It was the feeling of the senior sisters that Cora Beth had been especially touched by the commandant herself - remotely through the auspices of their meditations and secret rites - and that in time she would rise very high in their councils indeed. This knowledge was kept hidden from Cora herself however, lest she grow conceited and attempt to force her way into sectors of the cult too soon for which she was not yet ready, which would be disastrous. The senior sisters also wished to allow Cora Beth's trajectory to unfold, at least for the short term, in a natural fashion - for should there be deviance present then the young sister would be less likely to conceal it as carefully as she would if she knew that a potentially very specific future awaited her in the cult. For now they would bide their time, watch, observe.

Cora passed some of these sisters as she made her way to where the other cult recruiters were massing on the parade grounds - their numbers small for today for most of them were behind the walls of the former penitentiary tending to their own matters deep within the commandant's training center and more than half that

number were abroad - in the wastelands beyond the known borders of the organization's control, searching for human resources to feed the myriad strategies which even the sisters themselves only knew pieces of. Enough to keep them operable, no more.

Twenty of them gathered now and began to walk in unison, Cora falling in line with some of the other sisters - the youngest of their number and yet unblooded, the acolytes, in the van and the senior sisters bringing up the rear. The tolling of the bells became louder now as they reached the small gate that led into the outside courtyard of their chapel, newly built for the express commemoration of the commandant's alleged soon appearance among not simply their number but the organizational populace at large, at least those who would be attending the rally. That was a strong level of investment which Cora had considered, still it did not quell her doubts.

In the shortening of the winter days the sun behind the iron grey clouds had already dipped beneath the mountains beyond their sight, far to the west and twilight was now deepening - soon the land would be ensconced in black. Cora could see that half a mile or so beyond the parade grounds along the main road that the light behind, outside and surrounding the walls of the commander's headquarters had already been activated - leaving none who approached that fortress of terror means to hide themselves in the face of the organization. Guards of internal security personnel grasping black MP5 machine guns, oiled to a sheen and exuding lethality in potentia roamed the walls of the

commander's headquarters like ants. Along the small pine woods that lined the outskirts of the facility, hidden snipers crouched in false blinds and waited like vultures in concealed roosts, their brethren also similarly stationed atop the guard towers that surrounded the installation.

Before her now stood the commandant's chapel - the youngest probates of the commandant's cult, some of which had not yet reached their tenth year, opening the fence constructed of heavy metal piping. One delicate witch unlatched the lock while another, a brawny girl in her fourteenth year - her second as an acolyte of the cult recruiters, very near her initiation - unraveled the large hauling chain and pulled it back from where it had held the two sides of the gate together, gathering the weighty chain in her already formidable arms. She would be one to watch out for in very near future, Cora Beth thought to herself, an intimation of pragmatic professional appraisal melding with potential pursuits, lustful in nature, that might be engaged betwixt them in due course. Four smaller amongst the probates, all sporting long uncombed tresses of brunette which framed intense pale faces began drawing the gateway open, two to each side, as the other acolytes fanned out to either side of the surrounding fencing allowing the initiated sisters, all of them their senior, to pass through the fencing into the outer courtyard.

The perimeter of the chapel was constructed of ten foot high metal rods set at twenty foot intervals and stretched across with deadly concertina wire, the latter procured from the stores of the commander's

headquarters itself and of the same make and model as that which ringed the entirety of the headquarters many times over and had been in place since before the nuclear wars. The metallic razors inset in the twirling wire reflected the light of the myriad fires set throughout the parade grounds and those few smaller fires within the courtyard itself, tended by the elderly and diseased amidst their number who would soon be passing into the netherworld to walk in that liminal space between the planes, a dimension of insanity, strife and blasphemy, where they would associate with the commandant and her most confidential servants in that hellish dimension forevermore within the labyrinth of eternity. Amidst the razors of the concertina wire here and there could be seen the bodies of dead birds and other small animals that had been unfortunate enough to land upon the tangle of blades or run into the impenetrable barrier during the concourse of chase. Upon the crest of each of the ten foot high metal rods which supported the structure of the concertina wire were set skulls, some weathered, some fresh - each of them belonging either to a sister who had died in the service of the commandant's cult via whatever means, including self-sacrifice via the auspices of suicide or by the hand of another of the sisters in addition to some of those choice morsels, small children rendered dead by the hand of the commandant herself. The latter, remnants of clandestine sacrifices to which only the highest tier amidst their order were privy, were brought up from the depths of the commandant's training center by the most senior amidst their sisterhood - the bones always cleaned of every inch of

flesh, the white glistening remains stacked carefully according to their respective sacrificial victim in black crates which were disseminated amidst the sisterhood on the basis of priority mission.

The cult recruiters passed in grim procession through the gates into the courtyard - when the last had passed, the senior sisters, the probates and acolytes fell in line behind them, those who had been tasked with opening the gates closing and locking it behind them. There were no armed organizational personnel set around outside the perimeter of the chapel, nor were there any present inside – though, much like the commander's headquarters itself, there were more than enough internal security within reach – in addition to snipers - but just out of sight.

The chapel itself was unique not only in that it was the newest building dedicated solely to the commandant in light of the upcoming event but also that unlike most of the organizational infrastructure, which involved re-purposing and converting already existent buildings - adding to, or subtracting from - this one had been constructed entirely new. In the concourse of her preparations of the extraordinary rendered children for the rally as well as other tasks that had taken her into the outer parade grounds in recent months, Cora had observed the construction taking place and sometimes assisted in the supervision thereof - for each element of its design had been intensely managed by members of the sisterhood themselves.

Many secret corridors lay within the chapel and

many secret rooms, passages and antechambers had been laid within those walls - in addition to a subterranean area, several stories in depth. Despite its outwardly horrific exterior the chapel still seemed utilitarian in size for a construct bearing such a weighty purpose within the cult, none of the secrets that lay within were compromised from its exterior and none who knew of them would so much as speak the slightest intimation of the clandestine elements which were housed between its black doors.

A great deal of the construction itself was done by the cult recruiters themselves - their metabolism sped up by conditioning exercises and physical strength edited by the administering of certain chemical compounds and meditation, brute strength which excelled in its execution far beyond than the bearers of such would have been assessed of upon sight alone. There were also shock troopers employed in the building of the chapel, all of whom had been carefully screened, vetted and subjected to a full psychological battery by the cult recruiters themselves in addition to the screening that they had already undergone on behalf of organizational intelligence for consideration in involvement in the project. Most of them were already sworn to the commandant's cult - as attested to by the fact that each of them kept images of the commandant within their personal shrines in their barracks, the object of regular daily devotions and sacrifice. Many of the shock troopers involved in the project were beyond fanatic in their allegiance to the commandant - as attested to by the fact that their hardened and scarred bodies were often

covered with explicit and permanent cult markings via tattoos, scarification or branding which indicated their allegiance beyond question. Involvement in the project beyond the members of the sisterhood had been upon selection but word had still managed to get around and there had been more volunteers, shock troopers and those volunteers one and all zealous in their allegiance to the nuclear death goddess than could be employed. The excess of applicants, formal or informal, was a sign that boded well within the upper echelons of the sisterhood and served as a useful indicator of the degree to which the commandant's cult had spread within some of the sickest and most depraved sectors of the organization.

Those among the shock troopers employed in the construction of the commandant's chapel who were not already adherents of the commandant in their affiliation among the myriad cults present within the organization (though the commandant's was by far becoming the predominant, recent events and machinations inclusive here) were converted. The cult recruiters had many means and methods of effecting such conversion, including liberal utilization of sexual imprinting. Cora Beth herself had engaged in the same on numerous occasions as had other cult recruiters now amassed at the threshold of the newly built chapel - including the youngest of the probates. Though the latter were not skilled in the same disciplines as their initiated sisters, such work was encouraged as a means of on-the-ground training and a means to make both the bodies and minds of those who would enter into the feminine priesthood of the commandant weaponized in all possible respects.

The outside of the chapel was painted all black - the largest perimeter of its gates facing outward on three sides toward the outer parade grounds and the back of the building jutting up against a several acre area of pine woods. A steeple peak had been added - outwardly appearing as cosmetic but in fact functional, as a twisting stairway within the structure led to a small tower room reserved for certain of the cult's activities. Beneath the slits of the semi-closed wooden blinds which provided the only airflow into the tower room upon the exterior was a sign that had been designed for the chapel specifically - an insignia not seen prior within the sisterhood but created in the months of premeditation of the commandant's appearance amidst the populace. Upon a square field of glossy black a bright orange mushroom cloud had been painted as the foreground - in front the head of the commandant. A strangely pointed helmet of mesh and one black lens of vision which stared out upon the post-apocalyptic landscape - within all the potency of the largest catastrophe that the world had ever known.

Certain sisters had already begun moving into the chapel premises, those selected allegedly by lot by members of the higher echelon among the sisterhood. Cora Beth was not among those so chosen and lived in cells in the commandant's training center when not in the field. Cora preferred the commandant's training center as her place of residence whilst at headquarters as did most of the sisters who had known none other when not in the wilderness or canvassing for their faith in areas closer to

home within the organization's territory. When they were back at headquarters residence in the commandant's training center underlined and emphasized their position and strengthened their resolve for every concrete-walled portal, every holding cell, every bleak space was awash in the black energies of the commandant. And, as the commandant's training center itself lay in the most secure and hidden depths of the commander's headquarters itself provided double the potency - it was for all effective purposes the nuclear core in the minds of the cult recruiters and an area which very, very few were ever privy.

Still, all the sisters, Cora included, were hyper-aware of the import behind the construction of the chapel. It was not simply an honorific for the commandant's appearance at the upcoming rally, though that in itself was an act without precedence. She had appeared before a closed gathering of organizational brass in the not too distant past - the first time she had ever been seen outside of the very elect and that latter demographic were always silent. It had been the first time that her appearance had been verified by large numbers of people and the talk had swirled amid the headquarters and stretched out throughout all of the organizational territory in the months that had followed. Organizational high-tier from intelligence, internal security and other branches who had hitherto not been adherents to the cult of the commandant had come back from the weapons conference fanatic. Demand for paraphernalia for individual worship of the commandant had become so high that the demand had exceeded production and even

the most seasoned among the cult recruiters had found that their capacities were stretched, their abilities challenged to meet with the influx of new devotees. Even now the areas surrounding the commander's headquarters were beginning to swell in population as pilgrims from all over organization lands began to make their way along the blackened highways and byways toward headquarters for a glimpse of the commandant - for her revelation - for her dispensations.

The chapel played into this however it was also more, its own filament of strategy which had been planned with surgical precision. It meant that the commandant's cult was entering into an entirely new phase and that its influence would now be spread according to means and methods which had hitherto been non-existent, it indicated that the cult recruiters were now riding upon the waves of a hideous increase in their influence and manipulation within and without the organization - it indicated a time was coming of a great expansion of their power and with that expansion a required consolidation which would require the strictest discipline for all of them. For long they had been the criers in the wilderness and without a doubt many of them would continue in that capacity however now the advent of their messiah was in close view and as such a dread responsibility upon the heads of all those among the most faithful.

Cora gazed upward upon the black structure of the chapel looming before her - two large columns, black logs stripped of their bark, covered in black tar and then covered again in glistening black paint which shone with

a sickly glow. The commandant gazed down at her from her depiction and the sound of strange music could be heard emanating from within the building as she along with the other cult recruiters entered the vestibule.

Once inside the antechamber the cult recruiters began preparations for their meditations, turning toward tables which had been set out to either side of the room. Those who carried courier bags containing internal communiques as part of their tasks went to a room off to the right where lockers were prepared for temporary use for those not resident there. Despite the fact that theft would have not been an issue within the sisterhood, internally, there was always the possibility for internal espionage in the furtherance of factionalism. Cora Beth believed, as did many of her other sisters, that the higher echelons of the cult itself - very likely in cooperation with special branches of organizational intelligence - pitted individual cult recruiters against each other, created factions and dissolved them as well as a myriad of other manipulations in furtherance of various goals which were not entirely clear. Cora herself did not mind and in fact welcomed such machinations and when the opportunity arose to participate in the same she did so with enthusiasm. Iron sharpens iron, as she was like to say.

On the tables set out upon either side of the antechamber were small bowls inlaid within polished walnut cabinetry set just below waist level. Each of these bowls were filled with a pale liquid - azure in color, becoming cloudy when disturbed and filled with various

glimmering inflections. A chemical compound utilized exclusively by the full-time members of the commandant's cult and not distributed to laypersons, the cult recruiters would dip a finger into the bowl and then smear the liquid, which rubbed on clear, beneath their eyes, their nostrils and over their lips. The properties of the drug were unknown however its immediate effect was a profound sharpening of the senses - thoughts became alive, resolve hardened. Vision seemed to become of a higher resolution than normal, surfaces somewhat oily in appearance - sounds louder and more intense and, perhaps most importantly, the drug caused an almost immediate increase in the propensity for violence.

By the time Cora Beth had finished smearing the liquid drug upon her lips, the last part of this stage of the nightly oblations, her eyes had become almost completely dilated - only a small greyish ring of color visible upon ever-widening black. A cold sweat began to form upon her brow and slowly drip down her face and as she looked around the room she could tell that all the same telltale symptoms were visible upon the faces of the others. Some of the cult recruiters now wore hideous, sadistic grins upon their faces while others peeled their lips back in imperious sneers, their skin stretched, eyes wide and livid. All reflected as such their inner moods of reciprocation with the nuclear death goddess and as the dosing took hold more intimate natures still would begin to rise to the surface. As brides of the holocaust they now entered into the main chamber of the chapel.

Huge columns of treated logs treated and painted

black like those upon the outside of the structure rose up in procession on either side of the chamber creating a passage toward the area of the altar. The interior of the chapel was designed to be able to accommodate a much larger gathering of the faithful than those now present so the cult recruiters strode forward along the passage toward the front, prior to reaching the altar proper, some turning right, some turning left, situating themselves within the congregational areas and sitting cross-legged upon the floor.

Above the altar raised a primitive cathedral-like space toward the rafters - a hardened plexiglass window had been installed as a skylight, though the transparent pane now facilitated no passage of light but rather a vision of the outside nocturnal sky there amongst the area of the commander's headquarters. Bluish-black and cloudy for the most part, Cora noticed as she sat down that some of the clouds had parted revealing malignant stars shining dimly within the firmament which watched down callously from above.

Before them stood the altar. On the background was an image of the commandant, larger than any that existed within the cult excepting some found within the commandant's training center itself. Stretching nearly twenty-feet in height, the image featured the bleak image of the commandant's every facet within the starkest relief. Under the effects of the drugs the cult recruiters had been administered they could see the gleams of unnatural light reflecting off the commandant's skintight black uniform in three-dimensional perception, the nursery strap and other devices of torture upon her thin

waist swaying disturbingly by an unseen wind, the tip of the large syringe which she held in one hand pointed aloft with a tip that glistened visually with the moisture of the poisons that it carried.

Beneath her image was a living man - emaciated and tortured of body - an opfer. A sacrificial victim and of the only category of male which would be allowed into such a sacred chamber as this one, for even the thralls here in the chapel which went about the most humbling of tasks were female acolytes chosen from the ranks of the baby brigades. The community of cult recruiters within this new phase was as ever a closed society and as they entered into this new phase its ranks within such domiciles as this would only be swelled by sworn sisters or those who had been prescribed to undergo the proper oaths upon the proving of their mettle to their sisters superior.

The sacrificial victim was chained hand and feet to rungs which had been bolted into the floorboards beneath him and even further still into the earth which lay beneath, giving no possible chance for escape. In addition to the restraints, the programming which he had undergone whilst under the questionable care of the cult recruiters had been of such a harsh and merciless nature that any thought of such an exemption from his fate was the furthest from his mind.

Upon either side of him seated upon heavy plinths which rose up upon either side, flanking him, sat naked acolytes no older than ten. Shortish hair barely shoulder length framed pale faces chosen for their beauty -

porcelain-like expressions and bodies also as immaculate which assisted as secondary focal points for the assembled sisterhood, many of them who harbored unabashedly sapphic propensities.

Along the back wall on either side of the image of the commandant sat numerous high-echelon members of the sisterhood - none of them possessing any outward signal of rank or defining accoutrement that would distinguish them from the other sisters though some of them were allowed particularly deep cowls which were kept partially concealing their faces - a facility given as dispensation for certain of the senior cult recruiters who found such alterations upon their garments to be useful in achieving particularly deep states of meditative reflection. Though these small cosmetic alterations, only chosen by a small number, were indicative of the higher-echelon, the real identifiers were the countenances of the witches themselves - elements of their ascension along the way of the harsh alchemical change process which those outside of the internal cult would no doubt not notice though feel implicitly.

Cora Beth observed them now, as she had observed the night sky which shone darkly above them - their eyes which stared forth without blinking, flesh which possessed complete muscular control down to the molecular level. She herself, Cora, could kill a man with her bare hands yet these exalted sisters could extract the bones and organs from a human being while they still lived and consume the marrow while they still gasped their last breath. Cora Beth had seen it herself in the commandant's training center, in those innermost

dungeons that were said to be nearest to the intimate dwellings of the commandant herself.

The higher-echelon among the cult recruiters were not for the most part senior by dint of age - for some of them were younger than she herself - but rather inhabited their position depending on the level of their acumen. As they grew closer to the commandant through work and devotion, more integrated into her currents, their abilities too grew and through such their own propensities and that of the commandant became blurred. Among the most feared of their number the propensities were in fact selfsame, in quality if not in quantity.

As if on cue, one of these women rose from her seated posture and situated herself in a standing position in front of the propaganda image of the commandant. Despite the fact that her garments and the darkness of the chamber obscured her identity, all the cult recruiters registered by dint of gait that it was Sister Chazona. Throwing back her black hood she revealed a skeletal face, permanently distorted in a harsh scowl. Cruel, thin reddish lips peeled back to reveal teeth which were disturbingly canine and her wide eyes, bloodshot and hateful, scanned the small number of assembled sisters before her. Cora, like the rest of them, avoided averting her gaze, for such a gesture would instantly be cause for a scorching punishment before the rest of the assembled congregants or even worse, administered privately after the assembly had been dispersed. Cora Beth intended to be the victim of neither this night.

Sister Chazona, satisfied that the cult recruiters

before her were situated in an appropriate state of mind to receive the message which she was about to deliver, opened the convocation by grasping the head of the male sacrificial victim by his filthy hairs and pushing him toward the ground into kneeling position, the sounds of the large hauling chains which bound him to the floor beneath clanging loudly against his manacles. Across the chamber the cult recruiters stared as Chazona, still tightly grasping the man by his hair, pulled his head back revealing a plastic valve which had been surgically inserted into his throat. One turn upon the valve opening, less than a quarter of an inch to the right and the life blood of the victim would be released in a torrent of blood.

Chazona, her demonstration complete, pushed the man's head roughly away allowing his ruined body to crumple to the floor in a heap, his belabored hacking breaths, agitated by fear, audible throughout the chamber. As two sisters brought up a small black lectern Chazona waited by the left plinth upon the altar, idly rubbing the back of her hand across the naked hip of the young acolyte who knelt upon it - her eyes staring forward into a random point in the distance despite the senior sister's touches.

"Good, good, little one," Chazona purred quietly in the girl's ears. "Your aversion is the appropriate move in this instance - you play the game well, human statuary!" Chazona laughed and a single cold bead of sweat dripped down the face of the acolyte.

A black lectern was set upon the altar and situated between the image of the commandant and the sacrificial

victim. Upon its wooden face was an insignia, identical to that which hung above the doorway on the chapel's exterior - featuring the face of the commandant superimposed over the image of a blossoming atomic mushroom cloud. Sister Chazona moved behind the lectern, the image of the commandant's legs amidst fiery holocaust visible behind her, the upper half of the nuclear death goddess form looming down from above.

"We meet on this night, sisters, for a very explicit purpose, a very important purpose. All of you, each and everyone here tonight, have been chosen for your attendance - though many more have been crucial in their own way in preparation for the day which will soon be upon us." Chazona's voice rose and fell in emphasis, pausing for effect and to once again allow her bloodshot eyes to scan the crowd in front of her - looking for indecision, for weakness, for the slightest sign of temerity.

"Yes, we all know that the commandant herself will be appearing not only to us but to a multitude of organizational people - our people. Not simply members of the organization who bear rank, who work whether overtly or covertly toward the purposes of the group under the leadership of the commander..." Chazona again scanned the congregants, testing for reaction. "...or those who serve the cult of the commandant through their professional occupations within the organization."

"This time, the event will be different. For all who come unto the borders of the commander's headquarters will be granted the dispensation of her presence. All people from the furthest reaches of the commander's

territory, whether they be young or old - whether they have been raised under the iron fist or whether they have recently wandered out from the wastelands to bring themselves, body and mind, to the foot of she who dwells within the fires of holocaust - she who is the bearer of and who is that holocaust!" Sister Chazona's voice rose in apostolic fervor as her audience watched with intensity - their own fervor rising commensurate to that of the senior sister while also simultaneously dissecting every word, every turn of phrase, ever on watch for hidden messages - for intentional doublespeak - for specific transmissions inserted into the monologue meant for a particular set of ears.

Chazona leaned against the lectern, one thin arm stretching across - her hand grasping the ledge of the wooden box beneath her tightly, veins pulsing through pale skin revealing a disturbing vascularity.

"The appearance of the commandant at this time will be the inauguration of a new era - a return of the dark age. For those within the organization have become too weak! Too soft, too decadent in the pursuit of their pleasures - too reliant upon the stressors that only the organizational administration can contrive for them. When the commandant comes she will bring with her a backwards darkness - time is reversible."

Sister Chazona faltered there, ever so slightly, a pause of a few seconds only and Cora felt that few of the assembled sisters in the congregation recognized the sudden chink in delivery except for her and perhaps one or two others.

From the corner of her eyes Cora Beth glanced surreptitiously at the other sisters in the assembly. Elizabeth, her frame slight but not exuding harshness, twenty-three years living upon the scorched earth of the commander's headquarters and three years initiated into the commandant's cult seemed to react ever so slightly - a sudden intake of breath, a slight twitch of the face framed within long golden locks. Cora Beth did her best to suppress a smile as she noticed Elizabeth's own cognizance of her compromise as her sister's eyes went from a sudden cogent knowing back to a contrived milky stare. Had Elizabeth feigned the application of the drug in the chapel's vestibule or was her enhanced perception of Chazona's words integrated despite the effects of the serum?

Seated several spaces down from Elizabeth and on the row behind her was large, brutal Astrid of deep voice and even deeper set propensities for enacting cruel pastimes upon any unfortunate to come under her tutelage in the course of administrative correction within the cult. She had been a pontifex in the commandant's baby brigades before joining the cult recruiters, where she had learned her fell punitive arts in their fullness. Now, some years later, she acted as mother inquisitor among the ranks of the cult recruiters. Cora Beth could see that Astrid's eyes became more intense, her gaze narrowing, brow furrowing during those last three words of Sister Chazona's delivery. She too had apprehended what Elizabeth and Cora had also - namely that Chazona was working a deception - she was

intimating but not telling and even so, she may have already told too much.

CHAPTER 5

The lieutenant gazed out over the parade grounds which had been arranged and developed around the outskirts of the immediate headquarters area, his eyes burning with a black hatred. He could feel the oncoming of psychosis within his guts. Soon he ascertained, very soon, the beast that dwelt within him would be unleashed in full force whether he willed it or not. Would a change in circumstances or an outlet for his rage dampen or delay such an eventuality? The lieutenant considered carefully and thought not. One thing only was certain - Gaubni was coming and was coming fast and when he arrived all within his purview would cry tears of blood.

Thoughts arose in his mind's eye of the ritual within the tunnel before his black god a fortnight past - the feel of the brutal, merciless weighted leather whip in his hand - the uncaring and foul eyes of the Great Demon upon him as he consummated his wedding rites to his young bride. Oh yes, he smiled, the beast was well on its way. As he considered his past experiences back at the engineering center, back in the mountains of his god, rivulets of foul-smelling saliva involuntarily dripped down his mouth in an animalistic fashion - wetting his black mustache and collecting upon his black tactical

jacket before being evaporated by the cold winds that churned about him. Even as the winds blew more violently he could feel the tension building incrementally throughout his body - pressure upon pressure upon pressure.

And, when that pressure had built to its terminal point, then would come the snap, that irrevocable point of no return - the psychotic break - the avenue through which the Great Demon and the multitude of tortured shades as his companions, transmuted into beings of horror, child victims stretching back for generations, would course through his enraged veins like horsemen of the apocalypse and seal him, for a time, as their exclusive and terrible vessel.

The lieutenant had already delivered his payload of chemical agents three nights prior - their caravan arriving after the quick coming forth of night and darkness as it so occurred in those long winter months and requiring them in that darkness to push their way through more and more of the pilgrims from the outer areas that crowded their way upon the central road to headquarters.

Within his checkered yet privileged tenure within the organization he had never witnessed such a spectacle unfolding before the scheduled spectacle had even taken place. There were now more deranged souls traversing the bombed-out road towards the commander's headquarters - a place hitherto where none had sought to come in fear - than there had been even in the time before the nuclear war. With increasing regularity the security amongst his personal retinue had to shove

pilgrims aside to make way for the weapons carriers - though only cursory brutality was needed as most of them were starved and raving in abject religious mania in contradistinction to his entourage, hardened combatants to a person. Sometimes the groups of pilgrims would attempt to embrace the security personnel even as they were pushed off with nightsticks and batons. The black uniforms which some of the pilgrims had only seen intermittently in their threadbare existence in the outskirts of the organization's territory meant to them only one thing - that the nuclear death goddess was near. Their perception and experience made no distinction between organizational factions and between who may or may not be adherents of the commandant's cult. Their apprehension was rural, backwards, fanatic to the core and their apprehension of the black came without a shred of cynicism. In his own dark way the lieutenant could appreciate their purity - or rather, perhaps - the measure of their extreme impurity.

The members of the lieutenant's retinue, suffused in evil in and of themselves - especially under their particular command, which carried with it the distinctive mood of their immediate superior - could even still feel an unease among these demographics which flooded toward the commander's headquarters which hitherto was for the most part the domicile of those that they counted as fellow professionals. To them, fed mostly on speed-laced gruel and the ebb and flow of their months, the pace of their individual days being regimented with no opportunity for introspection - these wraith-like religious pilgrims from the hinterlands who spent their

days and nights primarily in the company of their own madness were anomalies, a throwback to the old days in the nuclear winter of atomic aftermath. How that raw fleshly material would be utilized further in the service of the commander's organization - a technical problem to be solved by another sector - could only be guessed at, yet, that the direction of things had begun to become increasing strange was a feeling that among some could not be shaken.

As the lieutenant stood now upon the edges of the newly constructed parade grounds several days post-arrival - the rest of his retinue at leave within the commander's headquarters or employed elsewhere - his own person accompanied by only two black-masked internal security personnel, the muzzles of their silenced MP5 machine guns pointed toward the ground, the weapons cradled lightly in their hands - he himself considered the changes that he had begun to see within the organization since that fateful event at the hangar. The unveiling of the newly designed organizational rocket - how sweet a day that was - how internally congratulatory in mixed but very entrenched leadership company had the brass reciprocated with one another and how unexpectedly for the weapon designer had his daughter been sold down the river by none other than yours truly. The lieutenant laughed to himself then, the internal security members wise enough not to visibly pay any mind to whatever internal reverie the lieutenant was experiencing, though note was taken, commensurate to their occupation. Nadezhda - so easy she had been to deceive - so horrific, apparently, was her fate now, for the

lieutenant knew nothing more than that she had been transferred to ECU, perhaps beyond it, but not in the capacity that she had expected. The organization had its ways of humbling even the most entrenched exceptions to the rule among the old guard such as her father, and for his part, the lieutenant was more than happy to have played his part in selling her down the river - a faculty that he had been called upon to employ many times during his tenure as an organization man in furtherance of perpetual revolution.

He had begun to worry recently on his own account as to his own situation to a degree however, though paranoia was always part of his portion as it was likewise the portion of every other member of the organization from the loftiest special organizational intelligence agent designing the breadth and scope of the life aspirations of countless persons before they knew what their life aspirations even were, down to the most insignificant shock troop whose main verifiable occupational purpose was being an object of abject sadism for the drill masters.

Another day had passed since he had delivered the chemical warheads to the commander's headquarters and from there, dispatched out to the border regions where the campaign would soon be underway. Hell, he thought to himself, bitterly, the warheads were probably already at the front! Though he had not physically seen them go he could ascertain as a tactical certainty that they had. He had not been consulted nor clued in to the trajectory of the materials once they had passed outside

of his direct care-taking and on that night the reception had been exceedingly brief, exceedingly perfunctory. Professional, yes, but nothing more - not an ounce more, as a matter of fact. The lieutenant was well used to operating behind the scenes - that was not the problem, but now here he was, simply biding time. No forward orders yet - he had been sure that he would be assigned to accompany the warheads to the front. All in due course of time however, he considered, all in due course of time. He could only trust that the commander had a direct assignment awaiting him, perhaps which required some time yet for complete formulation.

For the larger part of the logistical mission thus far he himself had acted as the prime operator - the receipt of the weapon, the testing of the chemicals themselves. That poor filth who had died in the yellow mist upon the floor of the canyon. The lieutenant remembered that well, a very gratifying deception indeed. Despite the gas masks he and Wendy had been able to taste the poison in the air as they cradled themselves upon a rocky outcrop overlooking the valley below - a testament to the potency of the agent that had been developed there at the engineering center.

He felt his member harden as he considered that time - the lascivious feel of the young girl's body pressed against him, the excitement of death, the pleasure of deceit and the promise of much more of that blasphemous triumvirate to come. There had been little time to enjoy his companion after they had disembarked the engineering center, the speed of their forward advance imperative and as such the march towards

headquarters being almost nonstop during both day and night and only a few opportunities since they had been back at headquarters. His mind was agitated as was his flesh.

From beyond the razor-wire perimeter of the commander's headquarters in the distance he could hear the sounds of the drill masters screaming commands at the shock troopers in the inner training areas - the sirens blaring, and he felt within himself, again, that slavering beast that lived in him straining to break free. He must have marching orders from the commander and soon, lest damnation be upon their own heads – and his as well.

With that thought in mind, the lieutenant stalked off at a breakneck speed back toward headquarters, the internal security members close on his heels. First to find Wendy and then to find someone who would provide him with the answers he sought, even if under duress.

CHAPTER 6

Astrid had been born into the organization in one of the headiest and most formative periods of its current incarnation, the daughter of two internal security members. Her father had worked exclusively in the cult sector and his activities had veered into the occupational standard of the special intelligence units by almost every facet so much so that he was requested again and again for reassignment. Shadowy higher echelons in the organization refused the transfer at every step and finally the offers ceased appearing - though his career still had him working with a higher number of special intelligence than those from his own subgroup within the organization. He knew, though he never stated as much to anyone, as he was sure that his occupational associates in special intelligence also knew that he was willingly or not a spy within the camp - an overseer reporting back to internal security personnel brass who often and with oftentimes rabid regularity competed with all sectors of intelligence - special intelligence in particular - for assignments, prestige, influence. As the special intelligence branch in which he worked knew his implicit status they also knew that they, simply by dint of continuing to have them within their midst, were complicit in the compromise of their group, yet with the

orders coming down from on high, there was little they could do and the nature of their activities were too imperative, too sharp and too immediate to make any attempt at blocking him out, for that too would be reported.

Special intelligence relied on him and for his part, Astrid's father, as a very loyal organization man, availed himself to the very limit of his acumen in forwarding whatever assignment to which he was jointly assigned - always the only internal security personnel in the mix, always suspect yet bringing with him areas of expertise to which the special intelligence unit to which he was attached seemed to be lacking. Yet, ordered to the very core, he was always most loyal to his own group and, upon his debriefings at the commander's headquarters, would regularly tell all - allowing internal security a window into special intelligence and allowing them to pinpoint in a microcosmic degree their rival's weaknesses, personnel deficiencies and providing a skilled ambidextrous informant through which they could build a model of special intelligence's own formulas and mimic them.

Their backs against a figurative wall, Astrid's father eventually found himself cornered against a literal one - found with his throat slit during an outward assignment in the woods surrounding the commander's training center which even then was a hotbed of activity for numerous cults within the organization's population, both organic and contrived. All proper measure was taken to blame the murder on a particularly fanatic commune that situated themselves on the border of the

near woods and the former national forest which stretched out into the country beyond, its acres in the thousands. A scapegoat for the crime chosen and duly dispatched on the basis of on-the-spot response from a superior on hand soon after the incident - the radio equipment to communicate with headquarters conveniently disabled and the situation deemed too dire to allow the circumstances to lay without the execution of instant judgment pending an inquiry back within the command center among administrative heads.

Astrid's mother, Elsa, internal security in another sector, instantly knew that the story of her husband's death was specious. On a hot afternoon one summer during her sixth year, the summer following her father's death, Elsa had sent her out of the cell they shared in organizational barracks inside headquarters, indicating that Astrid should take a walk around the perimeter and place a black ribbon on the lowermost rungs of the metal gate at the fourteenth marker. The next day Astrid was sent out on another afternoon walk. This time, her mother had instructed her to retrieve a small parcel that she said Astrid would find under a small stone near the sign for the twenty-eighth marker on the opposite side of the inner perimeter. Sure enough, Astrid lifted the stone and found an extremely small but dense brown bundle, tiny enough that she could fit it in the palm of her hand. Astrid remembered that her mother had been pleased that she had received the parcel and patted her on the head affectionately, but said no more of the parcel - only that she had done good.

Later that night Elsa opened the parcel by the light of

the red alarm lights which burned constantly throughout the barracks - a small note was unwound, an intercepted communique, the last copy of a triplicate, sent to her by associates in internal security who had worked closely with her husband. Her face turned pale as she digested the import of the message. Special intelligence was for a time on the rise within the organization and the favors of the commander himself - special intelligence were apprised of the fact that there were elements within internal security who would use information pertaining to her husband's covert execution as a means to undercut their political maneuvering. Among the potential internal personnel who were considered a risk, Elsa's name was at the top of the list. A lump rose in Elsa's throat - they were being rolled up.

That night Elsa left the cell and made her way across the grounds of the commander's headquarters to a small building situated near the ECU. Astrid, stirring under the coverlets, eyes narrowed to slits, saw her mother depart but said nothing. Bright lights flooded the area outside of the barracks and though Elsa made her way, by dint of training, when at all possible, through pockets of darkness in the corridors and external areas, there was no hiding from view.

The internal security personnel stationed upon the rooftops, the floodlights reflecting off their black goggles and gleaming on the black metal muzzles of their silenced machine-guns. The shock trooper loitering against the side of a wall. A courier passing by her along one of the corridors in the outdoor areas. How many of them were agents of special intelligence? Who amongst

their number were informants by dint of blackmail or fiduciary compensation - who among them were unwitting informants for special intelligence, by dint of deception? The risk could not be helped, for Elsa knew that the bells tolled for her, yet as one last machination she could, perhaps, exempt her daughter from becoming collateral damage.

Inside the small building situated near the ECU the low lights of candles burned, in stark contradistinction to the harsh lighting just outside. Instead of the sound of the barking of the drill masters and the tramp of booted feet upon the parade grounds, the odd alarm siren summoning shock troopers from one area to another and the robotic announcements from the internal loudspeaker system inside headquarters, this small building almost seemed like an oasis - the effect, entirely intentional.

A smiling female youth of teenage years, dressed in the ubiquitous black robes of the cult recruiters, rose from a soft divan situated against a far wall and approached her, smiling. From a small cabinet she withdrew a small clipboard and extended it to Elsa. Though the aftercare would be seemingly sincere, though perfunctory - payment in advance. Though Elsa had heard of the program she was disturbed that she would be required to commit so soon. She steadied herself and took the clipboard, hands slightly shaking as she wrote the name of her daughter, her youth scheduling identification number, the identification of their shared residential area and beneath signed her own name and number along

with the sector of internal security in which she labored. As quick as that the clipboard was taken away from her and she was surrounded by other recruiters - all most attractive in demeanor and possessing the most soothing of tones. These, Elsa thought to herself, particularly well trained.

Hands upon her, she was led to a small couch situated in the corner of the room, a small table beside it, the candlelight profuse but soothing. Elsa had had every intention of avoiding this part of the exchange - though she had only heard accounts that were more than second-hand, none of the internal security personnel with whom she worked directly having ever donated their offspring to the cult or, at least, none were admitting to it. Despite herself Elsa found her defenses failing as the black-robed women surrounded her, petting her and drying her tears, insisting she take a cup of hot liquid from them, fragrant in scent, which she wanted to refuse but took nonetheless and began to drink, even though she knew it was drugged.

As the effects of the drink began to take their effect the feel of the cult recruiters' hands upon her body became symphonic in her physical apprehension - the young faces' smiling, wetted lips, faces framed within long hair never shorn and beneath, long black robes promising endless sleep. Like sands emptying through the passages of the hour-glass she could see that her life was soon slipping away, the cult recruiters like tender valkyries whom served as battle maidens much more fell in demeanor. Across the room she saw her - the image under which the majority of the candles in the building

were situated - the black demoness, larger than life, instruments of punishment and death upon her belt and a wetted, poisonous needle jauntily cocked in the air. The smoke of the incense began to waft across the image and in her vision the smoke blurred with the smoke of the image of the atomic mushroom cloud behind the commandant's vision. With the hands of the cult recruiters still upon her, touching, caressing, sweetly soothing in emotional bonding and with the arcane, tonal qualities of the soft music played by others of their number in the air, praises to their goddess, Elsa found herself drifting into into a deep slumber.

CHAPTER 7

When the dawn came the next day at the commander's headquarters Elsa found herself back in her own bed tucked under the coverlets - her internal security uniform removed and folded as she herself would have done against the back of the nearby chair and, from above, the sound of her daughter Astrid breathing in sleep.

Within several minutes' time she knew the red lights in the corridors outside would turn to full brightness and the alarms would begin to sound even as the light of the rising sun was only beginning to shine across the westward horizon. She, like many of the others who dwelt inside the headquarters compound, had trained herself to wake a few minutes prior to the alarms - a brief period of solitary thought before the day, which often commenced with breakneck speed or, for those following a particular organization-driven cult, a moment in which morning devotions could be performed and nightmarish entities propitiated.

She remembered nothing of her conveyance from the building outside ECU back to the barracks. Soon after she had fallen into unconsciousness the same young cult recruiter who had effected her signing had left the building, making her way across to the entrance of ECU

under the watching eyes of the internal security personnel stationed upon the rooftops. There she had exchanged information with the guard who was stationed behind the plexiglass partition between the outer foyer and the secure area and soon thereafter a member of internal security tasked to the ECU had emerged from the corridors beyond. Together they had taken Elsa back to the barracks, undressing her and placing her in the bed in the small hours of the morning. Astrid, who the cult recruiter eyed lovingly, knowing well her future, had remained unaware of their presence - she herself in the depths of natural sleep, her mother within the chemically-induced straitjacket of a slumber decidedly unnatural.

A lump built in Elsa's throat as she considered then, there, in the slowly dawning light filtering through the thin upward window of their shared cell what fate awaited her daughter. As for herself, she was resigned - she did not relish the thought but she knew that her destruction in this life was predetermined. The information that had been revealed in the dead-drop that Astrid had cleared, unwittingly as to the protocol of the activity and the impact the message would have on their shared fate, did not lie and in the current climate Elsa was sure that the terminal interest in her person would not be rescinded. As for young Astrid however, though she did not remember what had occurred after the drug-laden beverage of the cult recruiters had taken effect, she remembered her own tears directly before. Elsa herself was already well familiar with ECU, but what laid beyond it, what occurred in the dungeons of the

commandant's training center, she herself did not wish to consider, yet, it was to the commandant's training center that Astrid would go - and by her mother's own signature.

Though the cult recruiters always presented themselves very similarly as they had the night before - she had seen them often, the religious orders' visibility within the commander's headquarters over the last several years almost seeming ever-present - Elsa knew that beneath the exterior of the mystic that a very palpable and dark secret lurked. For the nature of the internal dealings of a cult that worshiped the personage representing the wholesale slaughter of the world, billions upon billions dead and the earth upon which all who came after, the progeny of the survivors, scorched and poisoned for all future generations, anything less than the most hideous considered possibility was an untenable conclusion.

A tear dripped down Elsa's face and she quickly wiped it away. There was nothing for it. The commandant's training center was the only way by which the daughter would escape the fate of the mother. Had Elsa not put this scenario into play Astrid would be executed as surely as she herself - special intelligence would not hesitate to liquidate a child - especially a child that might grow up with the seeds of a vendetta against their organization. Murder was far too easy an option for the agents - a loose end terminally tied down, disappeared, resolved.

Outside the cell door the red lights turned to full brightness and the sirens began blaring. Astrid awoke

instantly, her body already sturdy in its sixth year jumping down off the top bunk and climbing into a unisex child's organizational jumpsuit. She already had plans for a change of dress - for later in the year she would have the option to join the baby brigades and wear a real uniform - black, tactical - made for killing. Since her youngest memories she had wanted to engage in the most explicitly military side of the organization, which had always made her father and mother laugh good-naturedly. "No need for one more in security!" her father had always joked, before pointing his fingers and imitating the "rat-tat-tat-tat" of the shock troops' machine guns. For now however it was off to the dining hall for her morning gruel - green plastic bowl designating unlaced - stimulant accelerants not being added until the eleventh year generally unless the child was in the commander's baby brigades and already combat rated. From there off to indoctrination sessions for half the day and then manual labor around the compound until early evening. The routine ate at her and she wished desperately for change - little knowing that change of a sort unfathomable lay soon before her.

As Elsa finished dressing, buttoning down her internal security jacket and fastening a similarly black utility belt around her waist, a small revolver resting upon her hip in shining black leather holster - Astrid grabbed her rucksack and headed toward the door of the cell before she stopped at the touch of her mother's hand upon her shoulder.

Elsa looked much similar to how she had looked on the day that she had learned of the death of Astrid's

father, a fact to which Astrid was very much cognizant. Turned toward her mother, Astrid could see that her mother's face was sallow, eyes hollow and haunted as they stared down at her with a sadness but possessing a particular intensity which Astrid found strangely disturbing. To her surprise, Elsa brought her daughter to her breast and held her close for a minute only, the sudden sign of affection - a rarity - all the more alarming. Breaking the embrace after a few seconds only, Elsa held her daughter at arm's length, her hands gripping the young girl's shoulders.

Though tears formed at the corner of her eyes, Elsa hardened herself and would not let them come, for dread deeds lay ahead - a black day for the both of them and perhaps the last for both of them should special intelligence manage to procure and dispatch her daughter before the cult recruiters laid their hands on her. No, she shook her head to herself in negation, even special intelligence would not attempt to interfere in cult business - it would be a provocation. Still she could not be sure, for they dwelt in an environment where alliances ever shifted but for her part she had done all that she could.

Elsa removed one hand from her daughter's shoulder and gripped Astrid's chin firmly in her grasp, raising her head so that their eyes met squarely.

"Remember, Astrid, remember this one thing."

Her mother looked at her then with the most intensive stare that she had ever seen, eyes that almost seemed ghostly but yet beneath a mixture of emotions

that burned like a furnace inside her. Then she uttered the two words, her last instructions and the last words that Astrid would ever hear her mother speak in the last moment she would ever be in her presence, words that Astrid would never forget, words that resonated throughout her years since and words to live by.

"Be violent!"

With that brief epiphany her mother brushed past Astrid and left the cell before a response could be made. Peering after her in the corridor, Astrid's last vision of Elsa was her back turned, her shoulders thrown back and proceeding in a rapid clipped fashion down the hallway - out of the barracks toward her meeting with destiny.

Astrid was interdicted by members of the cult recruiters on her way to morning indoctrination class after a short stop at the dining hall - the consumption of her threadbare morning rations taking a few minutes only. As she walked along the cement pathways toward the area of the children's indoctrination hall two of the cult recruiters approached her from behind, flanking her on both sides and as they began speaking gently, grasping her arms and leading her on another route - toward the entrance to ECU. She found herself disoriented by their banter and their charisma - both of them young ladies over twice her age, one in her mid-teens and the other in her early twenties. She had been chosen for a special assignment on that day they promised - and didn't the usual regimen at indoctrination and the subsequent hard labor regimen - digging ditches near the outer perimeter

or assembling uniforms in the factories grate on her? The cult recruiters had laughed and despite herself Astrid found herself laughing along with them. After the stressors of the night before and the strange encounter with her mother in the morning a special assignment sounded just up her alley.

She continued along with them amicably - passing the twin corridors of block walls that flanked the ECU with the black-masked internal security personnel with their grotesque silenced MP5s trained upon her as she passed - listening to their strange words of promise, certain of the phrases pronounced in bizarre alliteration which she found exceedingly curious though she did not deign to comment. Such phraseology many years later she herself would be expert in - loading the language some of her cult sisters termed it - linguistic hypnosis, the descriptive nomenclature favored by some others. The banter of her implicit abductors did not stop until she passed through the glass and metal doors of the entrance to ECU and then once within, two steps within the foyer only, a gag shoved into her mouth and a black sack shoved down over her head. Two internal security guards from ECU waiting on either side of the door had effected the second interdiction immediately - the cult recruiters stepping back to let the masked personnel go about their business. Gag applied, black bag over her head blocking out all vision and light, the ECU guards slammed her small body to the ground and hog-tied her utilizing plastic zip-ties. The rendition occurred with such rapidity that by the time she began to struggle she had already been restrained - the lightning quick and

forceful hands of the torture center personnel easily pinioning her limbs into position against her will and securing her restraints while Astrid was still in the very early stages of initial shock.

After Astrid had been secured and restrained the cult recruiters melted into the background - back through the doors out of the ECU foyer and soon repining with their other sisters back at the nearby building, their part in facilitating the transfer and making good on Elsa's signed contract done. Their quarry was now the responsibility of weightier and more connected elements within the commandant's cult than they - though they would be commended, as ever, for their fresh acquisition and could and would celebrate with all due religious fervor the disappearance of another child into the hidden depths of the horrific dungeons of their nuclear goddess.

The door leading to ECU and beyond buzzed indicating that the unlocking mechanism had been triggered and was opened from within - two more masked internal security personnel appearing and joining the two who had secured Astrid. Two of them grabbing her upper arms and the other two her thighs they proceeded double time through the entrance into the ECU - the reinforced steel door clashing closed behind them. It would be the last time that Astrid would step foot from the walled internal compound housing ECU (latter renamed ECTAC for a brief period, though known colloquially within security and intelligence circles within the organization simply as 'torture center') and the commandant's training center until nearly eight years later.

Elsewhere on the compound around the same time Elsa proceeded her own way, along the path toward the nondescript unmarked door that was the closet route to the drab space within the compound where her particular unit of internal security was stationed. Once inside the building she proceeded along the corridors, strangely bereft for this time of the morning. Further back along the passageway two masked internal security members fell in step behind her. The door to her unit was located on the left side of a dead end - directly in front a concrete wall and to the right a door to a utility room shared by her internal security unit and two others. As she approached the end of the hallway the door of her unit slammed shut and the door to the right opened - the masked internal security members behind her hastening inside. As soon as she had entered, even before she had an opportunity to place her hand on the holster of her side-arm, a member of special intelligence stepped out from the shadows, pressed the suppressor tip of a silenced Glock .40 caliber to the side of her temple and pulled the trigger. The assassin turned back onto the corridor and exited the same way that Elsa had entered, the two internal security members who had been following her - actually special intelligence operating with internal security credentials, issued from above - stayed behind to clean the splattered brain matter and blood which covered the white-washed concrete walls and remove the body. The door across the corridor opened slightly and several of Elsa's former assistants and superiors watched as the special intelligence operatives, cloaked in the attire of their own group

within the organization, performed their work in the grisly aftermath. The level of overt deceit was heady to consider - internal security credentials necessary to enter this part of the compound only effected by having the highest possible approval within the organization, indicating that the level of treachery had blessings from the loftiest elements within the organization. This, coupled with the brutality applied in the level of fratricidal internecine conflict and the blatant message given in that one of their number was murdered less than ten feet away from her station did not bode well for the internal security personnel so observing.

After their work was finished the special intelligence members proceeded in removing the body from the premises as the internal security from across the hall looked on, knowing full well that the body would be later butchered and consumed by an elite selected membership demographic within special intelligence who had been responsible for formulating and executing the repression operations first against the husband and now against the wife, Elsa. The internal security members watching, former associates of the latter and all cognizant of the earlier execution of her husband, would have to deal with much less fulfilling sustenance on the night to come, that and a grim day of professional tasks still ahead of them which would have to be performed with knowledge that, at least for the time being, their dark star was on the wane in the eyes of the commander. Those who were members of a certain fanatic cult among the internal security personnel bent their hands into odd

shapes and waved them across the area of their third eye as they proceeded back to their individual stations, silently praying that the iron fist of the commander would spare them.

CHAPTER 8

The blaring alarms of a hundred hidden sirens blasting across the landscape compounded with the sounds of myriad fume-spouting monstrosities as the carriers of Britta and Bluebird near the rear of the line rolled forth in mechanical fury toward the area of the sovereigns, now less than a few miles off. Panic would already be full in place by the time the neo-death goddesses arrived in the area - their personal units and elite troops from the organization would see to that - heralding via their atrocities the soon arrival of new purveyors of pain bringing with them a new age of pestilence to a land which had already experienced so much.

All in the regions that used to comprise several southern states within the former union knew the name of the commander and the foul reputation that his organization had developed. A few of them, in the valley regions that slowly made their way into the rolling hills and then into the slightly westward piedmont where the commander's headquarters was now situated, had heard the stories passed down from their parents and grandparents of those from elsewhere in the burnt remains of the nation who had descended into the area many years past like wayward disciples seeking union with the apocalyptic messiah whose coming had been

long foretold.

The stories told of the most brutal and uncaring of the survivors of the apocalypse - those who had not sought to eke out some semblance of the normative reality that most of society had once known prior to the nuclear wars but rather those who had already possessed a penchant for ultra-violence, those suffused with the most degraded of human proclivities that had been accelerated by the increasing state of upheaval that led to the final terminal nightmare. For that sort the nuclear wars - and the chaos that ensued - represented opportunity. In their minds, the fact that they had counted themselves among the few survivors amidst the termination of billions held within it the promise of a satanic destiny awaiting. While many of them had enjoyed their own sadistic pleasures either singly or in small bands the reputation quickly spread of the southern area where large-sale organized terror was being fomented systematically - rumors of a region that represented the zenith of hell on earth administered by demons in flesh bodies whose appetite for bloodshed, carnage and horror knew no bounds.

Like plague locusts those elements of society had flooded downward - along the westward valleys, through the ruins of the former capital, throughout coastal routes along the Atlantic and then for the latter westward again - death in their eyes and the promise of further genocide spoken upon disease-ridden lips. Though in almost all cases there were none among the organization to observe them - no surveillance except for the few spies in the areas on the nearest outskirts of the

commander's territory - these bands carried out their own brand of torture and repression of their own on-the-spot and particularly sick marauding variety with the utmost psychotic fanaticism as if the bloodshot eyes of the commander himself were staring down upon them from within the swirling clouds above.

As the neo-death goddesses approached, youthful in age and form but as horrific as any before them in countenance, armed not with the nuclear weapons of the warmasters of the time directly leading to the terminal period of atomic annihilation but rather the chemical, radiological and biological agents developed by and bequeathed to them by a new formation of terror spawned on the scorched earth of the former, the sovereigns within hearing distance of the sirens trembled - remembering well the stories of those who had passed through in the distant days past and knowing in their hearts that those who approached were worse than anything countenanced by their ancestors.

Atop her carrier within the glass walls of her observation chamber Britta smiled to herself within the specially constructed black helmet which she had been outfitted with - her expressions and nuances of mood masked to the other organizational personnel situated beneath in the operational area, all that was visible to them of her countenance being her blackened purplish reflective lens of vision and the sickly demoness face into whose image the helmet had been engineered. Some of them glanced back at her from time to time and, despite the fact that their faces too were concealed, Britta could feel even still

their adoration, their reverence, their fear - their lust. Sensing their attention thus, she would reciprocate by rotating her hips ever so slightly, shifting her legs alternately forward and back - knowing that the obvious visual apprehension of her naked skin beneath the sheer skintight clear protective garment would arouse them, how could it not? She laughed - the sound issuing out from the voice modulator like a crackling static that pierced their ears. Which among them would avail themselves of the blessings of their death goddess on this bloody day which loomed before them? Which of them would distinguish themselves as cruel enough, sadistic enough, psychotic enough to catch her attention? Who among them would bed the death goddess on that night - bodies stacked high and frightened screams echoing through the winter darkness? As ever the choice was hers and hers alone to make.

As they rolled forward both Bluebird and Britta within their respective carriers realized how close their regional command headquarters building was to the front lines. Why had the sovereigns not occupied those buildings themselves? Why had they ensconced themselves in the former civilian outskirts of the area, using that infrastructure instead of the more fortified areas closer to the border of the organization's territory? In both of their estimations the reason was psychological - an inborn defect, a faultiness of the blood that made them, generation after generation, long for a distant past which most of them had never before seen - the homely house, the welcoming hearth, the healthy brood welcoming them in sickening sycophancy. For their sins

they would be destroyed and for their backwards thinking they would feel with indescribable wrath the terror that the forces of the future would wreak upon them.

Britta peered down at the tortured face of Bonn staring up at her with bloodshot eyes from his position bent over the hood of her vehicle - licking her lips as she observed the accentuated veins of his forehead and the accelerated pulse of his blood. The thought of the insert foully penetrating his entrails and accentuated with every nuance of the rock and shifting of her personal carrier made her toes curl in sensual pleasure. She had had such fun with him back in the dungeons beneath the commandant's training center, the memories, the rapture! Though she had been inaugurated into the arts of her sex under the grunting ministrations of the field marshal prior to her transfer to the commandant's training center under the guiding hands of the cult recruiters - they too whom she had enjoyed and who had enjoyed her, once her arrival had been effected - she had come into her own post the private viewing of her and her older sister's joint forces, which served as the confirmation of her godhead. And Bonn - sweet, trembling masochist bred-in-the-bone Bonn - how she had loved him. Punished him, punishment upon severe punishment at her very hand and the long talks she had given him afterward, his head cradled in her lap, his hot tears moistening the naked flesh of her thighs as he cried. She amped up on violent accelerants and he traversing the tunnels of hallucination, grief and mental anguish under the decidedly unethical dissociatives

dispersed by the so-called medical staff of the torture center.

Across the way betwixt the sound of grinding motors, the operability of the ancient machines manipulated only by the most coarse measures of that latter-day generation who had for the most part forgotten the arts of their forebears, bound to a similar machine, was Nadezhda. She the assigned pet of Britta's older sister Bluebird - a sisterhood not by dint of birth but by dint of a shared destiny in acting out their roles as the emissaries of the commander and the commandant upon a region yet to be touched in full by the iron hand of organizational dictatorship. Britta considered the fate of their charges - their creatures - and the roles of her and Bluebird as their handlers, the guiding hands of every aspect of their reality.

Though Nadezhda and Bonn had been separated from them in their last weeks together back at the commandant's training center - the girls' charges transported forward to the regional command base ahead of their mistresses - Britta knew that even then both of them knew that their fates rested in the hands of her and her sister. Much like a mother or father might send a child out on its own - for a time - the child recognized and was fully cognizant that they were still under the mastery of their progenitor, their engineer, the authority which was responsible for creating them and, if need be, destroying them. Britta herself had felt a profound realization to this effect as she had sent Bonn out with the internal security personnel who had conveyed his person from the depths of the training

center to the awaiting black vans - staffed by internal security but operated under the auspices of the cult recruiters - not at all dissimilar and in fact in many ways identical to the same way and method she herself had been transported months ago from her residence with the field marshal in the large encampment at the border of the rebel region to headquarters for the first time.

Britta licked her lips in consideration of the knowledge that she had received the night before in the transmissions that the commandant had relayed to her during her time in the chair - information about Bonn, her dear pet, information about the breeding program that would ensue in the lands after they had been saturated by the deadly chemical warheads rained down upon them by her and her sister's units between him and Bluebird's pet, Nadezhda. Yet, almost more importantly, the commandant had informed her about her own nature - the nature of nuclear death personified and informed her, young Britta, about her nature as well. The commandant - the entity that had shifted all identities upon the face of the scorched plains of planet earth - had revealed to Britta her own identity - self-realization - revelations of the breadth and scope of what she was and what she was to become. Only hours past since the ordeal back at regional command, the knowledge of these secrets - which included as an expansion of herself the knowing of how she herself would administer her sector of the shared regime after the poison smoke of the campaign had cleared, visually gone, viscerally remaining - pulsed through her consciousness like liquid flame.

Britta gazed forth from the side of her vehicle and watched the struggling form of Nadezhda strapped to the front grill of Bluebird's carrier - only the most titular respiratory protective devices applied to protect her and Bonn from the clouds of poisonous gas into which their carriers would soon be entering into - their respective pets watching with eyes wide open as the residents of the sovereign territories died about them in proximity most direct. Why these two - Nadezhda and Bonn - chosen by secret ballot and other purposes unknown to her - had been selected as the breeder and brood-mare respectively among other, perhaps more suitable specimens among the organization for the forthcoming program were unknown to her. Equally unknown to her the whys and the wherefores of why, despite the deuced threats which awaited them once entering the line of engagement, that these two were so unprotected. Despite this, Britta knew the plan that had been given to them in the dungeons of the commandant. Nadezhda and Bonn were to be bred to each other and then their progeny together - sister mating with brother, son with mother, father with daughter until the border regions that had formerly been outside organizational auspice were populated by the issue of an incestuous union planned in the most secure and bleak interiors of the commander's headquarters. As Britta and her sister now set forth to create mayhem once more on the earth - a biological, chemical and radiological menace to spread atop landscapes and populace already scarred by the long to heal wounds of the nuclear wars - it would be under their administration that they would also supervise the

rise of a genetic abomination, the promise of which lay latent within Nadezhda's womb.

CHAPTER 9

Cora Beth stared absently forward, intent on masking any of the thoughts which roiled within her mind, as Sister Chazona continued her delivery to the elect number of assembled sisters who had been called into the chapel on that night. Although she did not countenance the fact that she had noticed, Astrid was aware of Cora's surveilling her earlier during Chazona's slight slip in delivery and as such knew that among a small number of the assembled sisters present that Cora was a threat. Astrid could feel deeply within her gut that tonight would be the night that would bring the sort of testing that she had long awaited and she was more than willing to pull out every stop to outplay the other sisters and in the process show them that a graduate of the commandant's training center was not to be trifled with.

A foul smell wafted through the room as Chazona parted her lips in a strange grimace revealing teeth that appeared abnormally sharp and a mouth's cradle sickeningly red. Encased in her thin skeletal face monstrous eyes darted to and fro across the room although her head did not move. On one of the plinths to the side Cora noticed beads of cold sweat involuntarily dripping down the face of the young acolyte who knelt naked and stationary awaiting her part to play in the

events of the evening. Cora smiled inwardly to herself while keeping her outer expression slack and emotionless - from the foul smell and the reaction of the acolyte, the feel in the air and the discoloration of the senior sister Cora could tell that Chazona was altering her body chemistry along the methods of internal cult practices which indicated that something very formidable would be occurring during the course of their session. What it would be Cora could not readily tell, however whatever it was all she could do was prepare herself in the ways that she knew how.

The time is reversible, what did that mean? Astrid believed that she could guess, as she inwardly pondered her past that had led her to this very moment before the image of the commandant - from the time of her extraordinary renditioning up to the present and all that had occurred betwixt - the horror that had been inflicted upon her and which she had, in turn, inflicted upon others during her tenure both in her position as a pontifex in the commandant's training center and to a degree since her graduation among the cult recruiters. She had however been left unsatiated since becoming a sworn sister. The means and methods that had been revealed to her, what to speak of the internal potency which had become tapped, developed and then unleashed - at least, in a controlled fashion - controlled by others to a great degree insofar as the constraints of the discipline of the cult recruiters were concerned - that learning had been gratifying, satisfying, to be sure. Yet there was still a rift between what had been and what was available to her in the now. Even without the more

esoteric training of the sisterhood, if that nomenclature was entirely correct in describing their internal practices, there had been a lack of the brutal abandon to which she had been able to apply herself as a youthful pontifex within the commandant's training center. There she had been able to execute tactics and stratagems, albeit roughly so, as she had learned them. Here, the restrictions in place sometimes seemed unbearable.

Chazona gave one last look around the room before settling her eyes ever so briefly upon the naked children sitting upon the two plinths flanking either side of the male opfer. The young acolyte to whom she had been speaking earlier, despite her visible cold sweat, which Chazona noticed immediately, managed to remain still - statuesque. As the senior sister's gaze settled on the second acolyte, however, there was a visible trembling, slight, but enough to be noticed not only by Sister Chazona but also by the other cult recruiters present. Meditative concentration held between their third eyes one and all, many of the cult recruiters licked their lips in sadistic lust as Chazona revealed an ever so slight smile at the acolyte's reaction. This one would be feeling the full brunt of the elder sister's expertly applied cruelty before the night was over.

Her more pointed assessments and observations again completed for the time being, Chazona began to speak.

"Before a fortnight has passed, sisters, a new era within the organization will be inaugurated and a new era within the sisterhood. But where does the demarcation lay between the two, if in fact there is any

such demarcation?"

Chazona scanned the audience briefly, her sharpened teeth revealed in a hideous leer, however Cora, Astrid and all the others restrained from any visible reaction to their credit. Satisfied, the elder sister smiled and continued.

"As I speak before you tonight, you selected, assembled sisters, there are beyond the woods to the west a procession of weapons carriers monitored by internal security and special intelligence and guarded by the most elite of their ranks and the most bloodthirsty of the organizational shock troops. Along with these are several sisters who will be representing the commandant in this for the time being - their purpose being to convey themselves along with the convoy in question to the very edges of the organizational territory near what will be the future line of engagement. There, at the newly established regional headquarters, they will be preparing preliminary training modules for the two rather and suddenly prestigious graduates of the commandant's training center who will be administering the outward area after it has been secured by organizational forces.

"The weapons carriers as you know are carrying our newly developed rockets - this in and of itself is a great advancement for the organization and changes the game and alters the playing field significantly, not only for the organization as a whole but for the sisterhood as well. There is a trickle effect, dear sisters, for what happens in the organization will in the by and by like clockwork have bearing on those most dedicated to the commandant despite whatever filtration may be in place

internally - just as what we foment here, in secret, will inevitably affect both the central apparatus of organizational leadership as well as the populace under their jurisdiction, whether for weal or for woe.

"In addition to these newly developed rockets are, perhaps even more importantly, the warheads with which they will be fitted prior to being deployed. For many years the engineers, the black wizards of our organization, if you will, have toiled in secret - cut off from the rest of the organization and to a large degree even cut off from the mercy of our cult except for influence of a remote nature. Be that as it may, they have had left and bequeathed to them so many nasty items by the grace of the commandant - for in the times before the nuclear wars it was not only atomics that she counted among her selection of horrors! Quite the opposite! The carriers now heading to the front carry with them a dangerous and lethal cocktail of chemical, biological and radiological warheads to be deployed in areas that have not the slightest measure of what CBRN defense entails.

"This moving forward into the near area means something very special for the organization and presents a very unique opportunity for us directly. For many years we cult recruiters, excepting a very limited smattering of internal security and special intelligence who in most cases have acted in a support capacity to our own missions, have been the only element to penetrate beyond our borders, while here at headquarters and the areas under the jurisdiction of the commander the name of the game has been consolidation of power - building the infrastructure of

terror and honing all operations to the keenness of a razor. It is with pleasure and unequivocal surety that I state before you that the razor has been sharpened and the time for cutting is upon us."

Both Cora Beth and Astrid became somewhat confused as they listened to Sister Chazona's continued monologue. She had been on the cusp of revealing something to them earlier on, something very peculiar in fact, however had sidestepped seemingly at the last minute and from then on she had continued with a speech that Cora or Astrid themselves could have delivered before any number of sisters well their junior or even acolytes - rhetoric - there was nothing new in what Chazona was telling them, or had they failed to grasp the interior meaning beneath her words?

The real message however was in Chazona's countenance, and that aspect could not be denied - for even now the color of her eyes had begun to change into an unnatural hue – this, combined with the other changes that Astrid and Cora had noticed prior along with an increased pallidness of the flesh made the extremity to which Chazona's shifting of her internal body chemistry was being effected disturbingly apparent even to the most inattentive among their number.

Now Astrid understood the seeming dryness of Chazona's delivered speech - her speech was simply her running on auto-pilot while her full attention and awareness was paid to the change that she was enacting down at the very molecular platform of her physicality. While nominatively topical surely, her words were less than quintessential. The naked acolytes on either side of

her began to sweat more profusely and the male chained to the floor before her began to twitch slightly. Astrid smiled to herself while keeping her face rigid - the time of testing would be not long coming now.

"Each of you present here have been chosen specifically for a reason in regard to this coming down of the razor."

Chazona scanned the audience and smiled without friendship at the assembled sisters, the unholy quality of her visage seeming to accelerate now literally by the passing of the minutes. Cora and Astrid both noticed that several of the assembled sisters visibly shuddered as Chazona's exhaled breath seemed to bear upon its wind a foul color, a greenish smoke. Neither Astrid nor Cora reacted but they could tell now without a doubt that Chazona was to be ratcheting up the horror to a feverish pitch. Even Cora had never seen anything equal to the display of this night in her several years within the cult recruiters - though Astrid remembered, during her childhood years resident in the commandant's training center seeing somewhat similar methods employed during certain very arduous ordeal sessions involving the high-tier among the commandant's retinue.

Chazona begin to grit her teeth - an unnatural guttural laughter welling up from deep inside her body as her eyes became glowing purplish orbs. The assembled sisters, all of them focused upon their third eye and applying other internal mechanisms salient to cult meditation techniques groaned almost in unison as Chazona stretched out her will to them, invading their

minds, probing, questioning, molesting. With skeletal vascular hands, their appearance concealing their monstrous strength, Chazona gripped the head of the male victim and brought it back revealing the metal valve that had been surgically inserted into the man's neck. Chazona traced a fingernail along the metal valve, the male victim shaking at the slightest touch upon the raw skin surrounding small metal tube, fastened shut with a greased metallic cap.

"Before you, sisters, is the test of the evening - your route to proof positive for a very, very special position." Chazona's eyes dimmed then flickered as she began to let the manipulations to her body chemistry rest. Elsewhere among the assembled sisters Cora gripped her fists so tight that rivulets of blood began to drip from betwixt her clenched fingers though she noticed neither the pain nor the blood as she began locking herself into a state of intense concentration - if this night was to be the night of decision she would be ready. Astrid glanced at her and her mouth turned into a snarl - she was past the point of caring whether or not Cora, the other assembled sisters or Sister Chazona herself apprehended her rabid demeanor. She would not be quelched. Too much suffering she had endured in the past and too much suffering she had inflicted to the point that her actions had reached a point of critical mass - the opportunity was before her, she would avail herself - her sadism would be facilitated even by the brute force of her own will.

The rest of the senior sisters glanced to either side of them as several sisters who had been waiting in the

wings emerged from small doors on either side of them - the passages which led down into the varied hallways, tunnels and other hidden infrastructure inside the chapel. Having emerged, the sisters, younger cult recruiters only recently initiated, situated themselves upon either side of the room and began to sound strange instruments - one each among the two groups beating a steady, funerary pace upon drums as other among their number began to sing a song dedicated to the commandant.

Chazona's voice rose over the sound, the grip upon the hair of the victim tightening - all among the assembled cult recruiters staring at the valve upon his neck and the sealed opening.

"The one among you who effects the sacrifice of this male will go down into the abyss and accompany the commandant as she inaugurates her traversement once again on the scorched earth of this planet. Effect the sacrifice and you will join her in black paradise."

CHAPTER 10

The lieutenant found Wendy where he had left her earlier, loitering in a semi-enclosed area outside one of the internal security buildings with two members of his personal retinue in tow - a smattering of other organizational personnel situated along metal tables here and there, including the two members of his retinue who were in fact serving as an infiltration cell directly on behalf of special intelligence command, the same persons who had contacted headquarters via radio transmission a little over a week prior in the matter of the lieutenant's unauthorized conveyance of a member of the engineering center demographic outside of the region. Having been embedded with the lieutenant's people for over a year, replacing another clandestine cell from special intelligence who had served in the exact same position prior, they were skilled at reading the lieutenant and on this particular afternoon it took little skill to realize that the lieutenant was moving steadily toward the edge. The men covered their mouths as they spoke, intending not to draw attention and further suppress the sounds of their whispers beneath their masks, however the lieutenant took no notice of them - his bloodshot eyes focused upon the far wall and his young bride.

She did not see her husband as he approached but he

saw her - Wendy's back turned toward him as she stared with milky absent eyes toward a poster of the commander encased in plexiglass and bolted to the concrete wall - the centerpiece amidst a line of metal crests representing various sub-organizations that extended outward from either side. A youngish shock trooper, battered face and and equally battered automatic rifle slung casually over one shoulder looked at the girl from across the way with curiosity, but seeing the lieutenant moving forward toward the wall he withdrew quickly - any inveigling between the lieutenant and an object of his desire being a likely terminal mistake.

Wendy was dressed in the baby brigade uniform that she had been outfitted with by the lieutenant's quartermaster soon after their first meeting - longish but painfully thin legs within the black battle-ready trousers fitting somewhat loosely upon a physicality nearly in its seventh year and tucked into shiny black combat boots, nearly new and well-conditioned with organization manufactured parade gloss. A black jacket covered her upper body, the hood thrown back to reveal hair blacker than a winter midnight - that and her very pale white skin being a tell-tale sign of her mountain upbringing.

Despite the growing fog of psychosis which roiled within him the lieutenant felt the sharp stab of undeniable and deeply genuine affection - obsession, in fact - as his eyes rested upon his bride. The feeling was like none other he had known before prior to that fateful meeting in the engineering center, and in his mind Wendy, himself and the elements surrounding their

meeting coalesced within his brain in a frantic montage - seemingly disparate elements extending their black tendrils unto each other creating connections, threads of potential unity which pulsed in his consciousness in tune with the black blood that pumped through his veins. Her appearance, the revealing of the test module for the chemical agents - the hideous cult of the Great Demon, his patron dark god, festering within the mist-shrouded mountains resting on the edge of the Appalachian wilderness. All become unified in his mind - sequences that had been decided by the hideous will of Gaubni himself - links in the chain of terror.

As the footfall of his black boots approached, Wendy turned and her face beamed up at him - pale white skin made ruddy by the southern winter which became colder day by passing day. Wordlessly they connected one with another - an occurrence felt by both of them. The lieutenant touched her face briefly and she saw the rage within his eyes and knew that what came this day would effect what would come later - it was a beginning, a piece of the chessboard of their shared destiny was being moved and she could not tell where it would lead or what consequences would come of it yet she knew within herself that all they could do was move forward.

The couple stalked off toward a secure area surrounded by an interior perimeter of fences and the black-masked internal security members from the lieutenant's personal retinue, four of them now, fell in line behind them, fanning out. As soon as the members from the infiltration cell sitting at the table saw the lieutenant, Wendy and associates - two of them their

own associates - disappear from within their line of vision the second among them rose up, speed-walking to the structural edge of the semi-enclosed area and peering around the corner surreptitiously to ascertain where the target was headed. Briefly assessing their direction and in consideration of the state which the lieutenant was in, the cell member turned, addressing the other.

"Get to the secure room and send a runner to special intelligence command fast - and I mean as goddamn fast as possible. Tell them that the lieutenant, the girl and four internal security - two his, two ours, are on the way to the military planning council - they are going to want to be apprised of this and may very well want to send some backup should worse come to worse."

"Understood, sir," the second man replied, before hustling out in the opposite direction - toward the unmarked door several hundred yards off, within which laid an encrypted radio for secure transmissions to his handlers at special intelligence.

By the time the lieutenant, Wendy and the four members of internal security arrived at the exterior of the internal secure area there were already more than a dozen special intelligence and additional internal security guards tasked to security for the organizational brass moving into surveillance positions on all sides.

As the lieutenant and his retinue closed in on the building housing the special intelligence command, Wendy heard a fresh clip slam into the MP5 of the lieutenant's personal weapon - a clear signal that the lieutenant's mood was running hot, even hotter than the spies within his ranks had ascertained - the sound

coming almost simultaneously as the heavily armed internal security personnel raised themselves from their positions of concealment on the rooftop of the command headquarters - their forms black silhouettes against the backdrop of the noonday sun.

Shining even more ominously were the tips of their silenced MP5 machine guns - their sights trained on each of their number, one to a person - yet several trained on the lieutenant himself.

"What's the problem gentleman?" the lieutenant roared, raising his own nearly identical weapon to his side - one filth-encrusted finger curling perversely along the circumference of the trigger-guard. His model was identical - nearly - for the clip which he had loaded was filled with ammunition designed for maximum carnage and, unlike the internal security personnel upon the rooftop whose capacity had been mostly concerned with security since their tenure - internal to headquarters and rarely challenged, his own weapon, comparatively battered but meticulously maintained, had been the cause of hundreds of deaths in areas spanning the width and breadth of the commander's variegated martial interests.

There was no sense of agitation from the larger force which was now arrayed against him, only a cold sangfroid commensurate to their superior numbers and steely discipline - the protectors of agendas and persons who honed them whose import outweighed the personal loyalties of the commander to his wayward commando - a tenuous loyalty which now seemed to be unraveling

before the very eyes of the latter. In their overt show of force the lieutenant's deepest suspicions and misgivings had become realized - yet even then the depths of the internecine betrayal at play were unknown to him - unknown until half of his own small retinue separated themselves and trained their guns on him also, in concert with the internal security stationed atop the roof.

The lieutenant roared anew - his gaze becoming bloodshot, glazed and exceedingly dangerous as he saw that he was to be the scapegoat - the rabbit in the trap - with an entrapment reaped by the machinations of special intelligence over a long, long period. This was revelatory as he knew now in that one instance that his activities had been compromised - with he himself as the target. Veins pulsed upon his muscular neck, his breathing becoming quicker and quicker - deeper and deeper breaths all the more violent - sucking in the chill air and exhaling hot steam from between tightly clenched teeth.

As the two traitors within his midst stalked toward him slowly in tactical stance, fingers upon the triggers of their silenced MP5 machine guns, the lieutenant turned in an equally slow and disturbing motion before deftly sliding the stock of his own rifle through his hands and swirling it in an arcing motion before bashing it into the head of one of the internal security personnel in a premeditated and lethal strike, immediately causing sprays of blood to fly from the eye-sockets of his opponent through the frame of the single line of vision afforded by his balaclava.

One localized target crumpling to the ground in death, the lieutenant spun again, ramming the suppressor attached to the tip of his rifle into the kidney of the other internal security personnel - his weapon clattering to the ground, the lieutenant poised above his fall before a lightning quick gesture of his own black-booted foot crashed down upon the organizational member's skull - a pathetic wheeze of final earthly breath issuing from the man's mouth as he drifted evermore into the troubled darkness of an undead existence beyond the grave.

The lieutenant lifted the now blood-encrusted lug sole from the ruined head of his erstwhile associate, smiling upward insanely at the sun above him and at the black-masked internal security personnel below who held their positions steadfast - unmoving with no shots being fired. He cleared his throat dramatically and spat, allowing the mucus-laden payload from betwixt his lips to drift slowly upon the stationary body closest to him - the gore from the cranial wound now beginning to pool and spread in an ever-widening circumference upon the flat concrete tarmac leading to the intelligence center.

The dual glass doors of intelligence opened with a sound almost resembling a vacuum seal and two columns of black-masked internal security issued forth - their machined rifles held at the ready but not pointed at the lieutenant, Wendy or the two remaining members of his entourage - both loyalists to the lieutenant but who, by their long and unwitting association with spies in their own midst, would in due course meet their own death and that by the lieutenant's own hand. Their loyalty now entirely suspect - as was their acumen.

Between the masked column walked another and alone - no mask and no insignia upon his black uniform belying rank, nor indicator as to what sector of the organization he belonged to - though the door from which he had exited said it all. Aging and with a bald head that shone with a sweaty sheen beneath the sky, unnaturally bright for the time of year, he clasped a burning cigarette between thumb and forefinger - the acrid yet enticing smoke emanating from his cracked lips a throwback to degrees of pleasure long forgotten except by a very elite nomenclatura within the organization, the small bluish clouds wreathing his face but not disguising a cold yet visibly haughty expression.

"No harm done in that, lieutenant," the bald man spoke, gesturing with his cigarette to the bodies of the slain internal security personnel which lay upon the ground before him, limbs akimbo. "They had that coming - just surprised that it took you this long."

The lieutenant snarled at the overt provocation, though his reaction - expected by the intelligence representative - that or something like it - elicited no symmetrical response, only a continued steady gaze from the intelligence officer.

From the periphery of his vision the lieutenant could see that the two remaining internal security members near him began to slowly back away - his erstwhile loyalists - whether they were themselves privy to what had gone on or not, the sight of their crumbling under a pressure which should for them be small he found to be disgusting in the extreme. Had he himself not taken

them out from the black site of the armaments unveiling not but a few months ago, having already displayed to them his nature? Pearls before swine - dispensations undeserved.

Spitting again and turning his head in a long back and forth motion the lieutenant gestured for Wendy to come close - she who had been standing, watching with blank expression and with no sign of fear throughout the concourse of the confrontation to this point. Here was one upon whom he could count - here was one among his number, outside of the demographic of the the traitors and the scum, one who possessed the necessary mettle to walk lockstep and forward along whatever path may now be open - whether it be bound for glory or for hell.

She walked toward him steadily with a gait somehow not at all like that of the tentative girl that he had first met there in the engineering center, no hint of hesitation nor hurry within her movements but rather a firm, iron tread - the executed procession of one who held within them the blood of autocrats and despots alike and, often, selfsame. With one hand still upon his MP5 - now cradling not the trigger guard but the trigger itself - his vision straying to two points of observation at once, one upon the intelligence agent with his still smug countenance, but the brunt of his vision focused upon Wendy, the true daughter of Gaubni. His free hand stretched toward her and she came, nestling her lithe uniform-clad body against his frame, his hand snaking over her shoulder and clasping her body tightly against his own which began trembling involuntarily.

"Lieutenant, this one is not for you," the intelligence agent stated in a voice strangely paced, yet carrying a clear and distinct command tone requesting acquiescence - a statement bearing no hint of provocation but rather profound gravity.

"Let us put this gambit behind us."

The lieutenant responded by putting a round into his head as Wendy laughed - her pale face contorting into a sinister expression of glee - eyes crinkled in mirth as the impact of multiple automatic blasts into the body of the intelligence agent sprayed blood in copious amounts and at high pressure from open and smoking wounds. The midwife of Nadezhda and Bonn now lay silent, even as several biological agendas pushed forward - the glistening pairs of eyes that he saw in his last earthly moments not the least among them.

The internal security personnel stationed on the wall above them watched with gazes concealed by the black bars of their goggles atop midnight black balaclavas, unmoving, a few giving subtle signs of salutary acknowledgment as they watched the body of the intelligence agent in its final death throes.

A lethal wheel turning and ever turning, the lieutenant and Wendy themselves turned and walked away even as the internal security members on the rooftop began to leave, two by two and in small groups. The yet to be chastened remaining members of the lieutenant's entourage had run long before.

There would be no herald for what now lay before the lieutenant and his bride in the organizational canon

from this point, the lieutenant considered to himself. It was now a long walk into the gory maw of an abyss unknown. Unnatural in that moment, he knew not what stood beside him now but wherever she might go he, in recklessness, would follow.

Wendy looked up toward him - her sneering face exhibiting something distinctly alien and other. A true daughter of Gaubni. Then, together, arm in arm, they departed.

CHAPTER 11

The beatings began almost immediately once in the commandant's training center. Though Astrid had received somewhat of a share in her then six years since her birth at headquarters, the instruments for administering the same passed out to the parents of future organization personnel who were encouraged in their liberal use, her parents had never bothered to a great degree. She being self-possessed but not disruptive, they being too distracted in the intricate webs of security work and espionage on the professional level to become intensive about socially engineering their own daughter independently - rather trusting that the organization would step in the areas where their own energy and inclination was waning. On that day after her renditioning in the foyer of the torture center the organization - the blackest sector of it - stepped in and in a dramatic fashion.

Hooded, gagged, slammed to the ground and hogtied as soon as she had entered the external entrance to the ECU compound, Astrid had felt the first initial shock of her tenure as a child signed over to the commandant. Many more were to follow. Even so, those first moments of experiencing extraordinary rendition - the point of capture - lay burned in her memory even

long after certain of the other more dreadful ordeals had run together, one into the other and fading naturally in their recalling - receding into the depths of her subconscious mind, only accessible should she choose to do so utilizing cult meditative techniques. The emotional turn that had occurred in her mind however during the very early preliminary - the smiles of the female cult recruiters and their soft touches exchanged for the brutal hands of the internal security guards of the ECU and the silence of an unknown hell gaping before her - that would never be forgotten.

As soon as she had been secured the guards picked her up and she heard the loud buzzing from the interior door which led through to the ECU and then further in a gradual downward fashion into the torture center proper. Within the torture center, the commandant's training center itself and, beyond that still, the areas in which the commandant herself was said to be domiciled, never seen unless those who entered into those lakes of fire were never seen again as well. The bones of children that could sometimes be seen being extracted from the training center however indicated that the commandant - or something else perhaps, either way, an entity possessed of an extreme propensity for horror and bloodshed - dwelt in those lowest levels.

The amount of internal security guards that conveyed her through the doorway leading into the torture center proper was overkill as any one of them, large and brutal physical stature and constitution one and all, could have thrown Astrid's six-year-old self over a shoulder and be done with it. But the tone of the

rendition was part of its black ceremony - it was as psychological as it was functional.

Immobile by dint of the zip-ties expertly applied, completely unable to cry out due to the ball-gag and seeing only the black interior of the hood, Astrid was brought double-time through the corridors that led her eventually to the reception area for those children destined for a lifetime of service to the commandant. In what capacity they would serve was, as ever, the will of the commandant and the commandant alone, though the illusion of self-determination was sometimes trotted out as a measure of experimental social engineering - to see who would seek to rise, who would seek to hide and who would allow themselves to fall.

In the years before the nuclear war within the ever-rising population of those youth who found themselves within the clutches of governmental jurisprudence, the detention centers were often referred to colloquially among the young inmates as "gladiator schools." If the word "training" itself was used in the actual official title of the institutions - often run by members of the private sector on contract to the government, those sometimes even more sadistic than their publicly-funded counterparts - it guaranteed that the level of sadism would be ramped up to a particularly heated degree. That, along with an emphasis on forced humiliation and pitting the confined members of the demographic being held against their will against each other - techniques approved of and formulated in the military sectors of government and those coming from a background in the

same but tempered in the flames of religious fanaticism for a burn all the more grotesque.

The training nomenclature had survived the scorched earth of nuclear holocaust - at least for the commandant's particular sectors designed for the youth within the organization - and though the mechanisms of such institutions in the past may have been questionable at times, not only bordering on the sadistic but liberally crossing the bounds with exceeding regularity in the land formerly known as the United States especially - the social mechanisms employed within the one and only training center utilizing that name, post the nuclear wars, was something else entirely.

Blinded completely by the hood, Astrid was completely incapable of any visual orientation of where she was being taken - though as the minutes passed in darkness, her muscles now beginning to cramp painfully under the strain of their bondage, she could feel the air becoming cooler and the pressure becoming harsher indicating that they were steadily making their way downward. After what was in actuality twenty minutes - the longest twenty minutes of life thus far, feeling like much longer, she began to hear sounds rumbling up from ahead of them - she was now well beyond the threshold of the more "conventional" areas of the ECU and entering into the torture center and the periphery of the commandant's training center. The sound of heavy metal doors banging all around her on either side resounded throughout what was now a thoroughly subterranean passageway - accentuated by the sounds of screams, abject sobbing and hellish, demonic voices

emanating from localized speakers within them. Along with these she heard and felt the vibrations of strange machinery, tactile apprehensions which she had never experienced before and for which Astrid had no readily identifiable reference, in addition to the unmistakable sounds of lashings against naked flesh.

At last they stopped briefly - the sounds of a buzzing door opening in front of them and then a few more steps as she was brought through. The internal security guards holding her dropped her emphatically and unceremoniously to the ground, letting her body take the impact against the cold unyielding concrete floor. She cried out involuntarily as the force of the fall bruised her ribs and cracked against her chin, yet no sounds issued forth from the ball-gag with which she had been fitted, her throat choking in protest against the saliva which dripped down her chin and out from around the circumference of the gag in marked discomfiture.

Once down, the guards were handed a pair of large metal shears by one of the cadets from the commandant's training center present in an observational capacity there in the medium-sized chamber into which Astrid had been taken. With brutal speed two of the internal security members begin cutting the organizational jumpsuit off her body starting from the legs, creating several small lacerations in her flesh as they did so - then pulling her onto her side, still bound and hog-tied, slicing through the fabric covering her chest and midsection and pulling the garment off - another snipping off her small panties and removing them with

one swift motion before kicking her with booted feet back into position. Now naked except for the hood which covered her head, she waited.

Within the span of several minutes she heard the door behind her buzzing once again, opening and then slamming shut and she could feel the presence of several figures around her in addition to the internal security guards who had carried her down. Without sight but instinctively Astrid began to feel an indescribable terror penetrating her body, her flesh breaking out into a cold sweat and churning pain forming in the depths of her guts. The newly arrived persons began to speak among themselves in muted voices yet the voices were unlike anything Astrid had ever encountered in her life thus far at the commander's headquarters for they seemed to be modulated, inhuman in timbre and inflection.

Astrid felt herself being once again lifted off the floor, this time placed painfully into a semi-kneeling position, her feet and hands stretched outward behind her back in the positions of which the bonds involuntarily held them. With a single rapid cutting motion of a black combat knife wielded by one of the internal security guards the zip-ties were removed, taking some of the skin from her wrists with it, and she was picked up and placed onto a cross-beam face-down - the internal guards working in concert fastening leather restraints over her hands, her ankles and across her midsection - tightening the latter so that her backside was jutted out and obscenely displayed.

Though still blinded Astrid could imagine what sort of

ministrations might be forthcoming, either from the guards or whatever inhuman monsters surrounded her in the chamber. Why had this happened? Where was her mother? Where was her protection? The answers to those questions would only be answered - years after the fact - when she herself had been integrated into the commandant's training center as a cog in the wheel, a participating partner acting in full collusion with the forces that were now centered on breaking her mind and transfiguring her body according to the insane will of the demoness into whose service she had been conscripted. Hot tears streamed down her face, intermingling with the cold sweat upon her body - her entire physicality trembling uncontrollably as abject panic ensued.

The hood covering her face was removed and Astrid blinked through her tears at the sudden harsh light that streamed down from above her, harsh fluorescents embedded high within the ceiling reflecting off walls of concrete block that had been slathered in white paint again and again since before the nuclear wars and again several times per year continually in the intervening years since. One of the internal security guards stepped in front of her, all viewable to her being his black-uniformed midsection, a small wooden plank fastened into the crossbeam upon which she was strapped beneath her neck forcing her chin up into a forward-looking position. Another guard followed his associate, latching a collar-like leather strap over her neck and the device upon which it was positioned, buckling it secure and tightly - not so tight that asphyxiation would ensue but tight enough that this extremity of her body was also

now thoroughly immobile.

Astrid could see the individuals whom she had heard before now as her eyesight adjusted to the brightness - they were unmistakable in their flowing black robes - some with likewise flowing hair, others with strange styles, some with heads completely shorn and a few of the latter with crowns covered in bleeding suppurations. Members of the commandant's cult - cult recruiters - female one and all. However she could see, as she could feel, that they were very unlike those cult recruiters whom she had encountered earlier in the day, those who had effected the deceptive ploy that had led to her renditioning. They had been for all effective purposes human - girls even, though some several years her senior, but girls all the same - despite the fact that she knew (and could feel, as others could) that they possessed levels of occult training that positioned themselves at an advantage above and beyond most of the members of the organization. The experience of the cult recruiters before her was entirely different - this Astrid had felt even before the hood had been removed, even before she had been apprised visually of their countenances. These cult recruiters had been transformed, transfigured - irrevocably changed by fell and horrific measures - no longer women, fanatic women in flesh bodies, but rather entities bearing resemblance to their once fanatic feminine selves.

Still they spoke to each other in hushed tones that sounded like strange modulated mechanically-altered distortion - stranger than the bleak audial issuance of

command prompts and other assorted brainwashing mechanisms that she had heard during her descent here into the commandant's training center.

Her body began to shake as one of them separated from what appeared a murder of crows in their flowing black garments and walked toward her - eyes penetrating into Astrid's own, insane, bulging and bloodshot within a thin face that grinned obscenely, taking sadistic pleasure in the sight of the young girl bound helpless before her. The cult recruiter reached around to the back of Astrid's neck and removed the ball-gag and another one approached, grim in disposition with a shaved head and grey eyes, who proceeded to stuff a narcotic-soaked rag into Astrid's still open mouth.

Beginning to choke against the wetness as soon as the chemicals began to trickle down Astrid's throat she could feel an unnatural coldness beginning to flow through her veins - her vision blurring involuntarily then refocusing as her body first sought to fight against the foreign substance introduced into her biology and then surrendered to it.

She could see the cult recruiter with the shaved head washing her hands in a small basin brought to her by another of the cultists and then afterward removing several small shining metal instruments from a leather case set upon a small table at the side of the chamber. Approaching Astrid once more the cultist fastened the objects onto Astrid's eyelids - small filaments inserted into the underside of the lids on the upper and lower sides and then held open with a small twisting of a

clockwork-like mechanism upon the side of the frame.

Apprehension of her state of extreme vulnerability mixed with the effects of the narcotics and the shock of her rendition began to pulse through Astrid in waves of horror. From speakers set high upon the corners of the room a continuous harsh tonal vibration began to emit and she felt as if her head was beginning to split in two. She could see the cult recruiters busying themselves about their work to the sides, engaging in preparations for this inaugural session - the first of so many more to come - the entrance period to the commandant's training center being one of the nastiest for the pure shock involved and the perspicacity with which the personnel worked, knowing full well the very specific measures that should needfully be applied to break down the children now under their charge thoroughly and rapidly.

Directly in front of her was a large image of the commandant, life-size or even enlarged beyond her own physical stature perhaps, hard for the telling, for the commandant herself was a giantess and the form with which the nuclear death goddess assumed in the post-apocalypse, whilst humanoid in appearance, was still far beyond the proportions of any other. The commander, the supreme martinet of the organization, was a figure beyond reckoning - a military genius who had transformed himself into the highest tier of his black potential for martial dominance and totalitarian governorship. Yet, at least according to oral tradition within the organization, he had once been as the members of the organization were - humans undergoing

the harsh and brutal transfiguration for which existence in the end-times and the times past provided due opportunity. The commandant was something different altogether - she was the radioactive fire of the twenty megaton bombs that had been dropped over and over and over. She was the nuclear winter that followed, she was the irrevocably poisoned earth that followed still after and the futile screams of billions of human lives decimated in the instant flash of nuclear death.

Several of the cult recruiters swarmed toward her - blocking the view of the image of the commandant before her and filling her vision, unblinking by dint of the mechanisms which had been applied to her eyes and the collar which restrained her neck in forward looking position. The preternatural visage of the entities which assailed her were horrific in the extreme - their already thoroughly unnatural dispositions being even more horrific in apprehension by dint of the narcotic soaked rag which both denied Astrid's ability to vocalize and warped her mind as the chemical compounds dripped down her throat and were assimilated into her bloodstream in an ever heightening and dangerous dosage. Looking into their harrowing eyes she felt herself begin to scream - yet the scream was blunted by her gag and she felt herself beginning to hyperventilate - the panic beginning to accelerate toward a critical point - her heart beating in dreadful arrhythmic pace in her chest between her exposed non-existent breasts upon either side of the cross-beam.

"She is proceeding into cardiac shock!" shouted one of the cult recruiters in a voice that sounded like it

emanated from the depths of hell, a feral growling sound - her face only a few inches from Astrid's own - not looking aside but addressing her observation to the grey-eyed cult recruiter with the shaven head who bent down beside her, also examining Astrid with a decidedly merciless, cold and alien observation.

Another one of their number approached the cult recruiter with the grey eyes, proffering a small metallic plate upon which was smeared a disturbing bluish translucent paste. The cult recruiter dabbed a bit of the substance upon a thin cruel finger, topped with an elongated sharpened nail, and daubed it upon Astrid's forehead - carefully so and with training and due attention so that the substance did not intermingle with the sweat pouring from the little girl's brows. Immediately the asphyxiation and the attack upon Astrid's respiratory system began to subside.

Astrid could feel the cooling sensation from the cult recruiter's balm application wash over her - coalescing with the ice-cold current running through her veins by dint of the narcotic. For the time present there was no more fight left in her and she gazed forward at her captors and the image of the commandant that loomed behind them, knowing full well that she was now one of the forgotten. In the societal and professional aspect of the organization she was now neither here nor there - locked in a liminal space between worlds, hidden, accessible by none. The commandant's training center - the place where children disappear forever.

It did not occur to Astrid then - nor did it occur to most within the organization at any juncture that many

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of the cult recruiters were graduates of the training center, as were some members of the ultra-elite units of internal security, special intelligence as well as most of the members of the praetorian guard attached to the zenith leadership. As to the former, the cult recruiters, when they presenced in any area it was always as if they had almost manifested from thin air - wild-eyed fanatics blown in from the outer wilderness - doom in their minds and songs in praise of the nuclear death goddess upon their lips.

This suddenness in their appearance was in fact effected by the policy and traditions of the cult recruiters themselves, for when female youth were taken from the commandant's training center - some graduates selected - they were spirited away from the headquarters in the dead of night, met by black vans waiting for them on the razor wire's perimeter. Standing on the gravel beside the van in a small group, four or five at most, they stripped themselves naked under the glittering concertina beneath the floodlights - trading in the uniformed black skirts, black socks, crest-bearing blouses and leather shoes for the single black robe of the acolyte. Now newly attired, a practical as well as symbolic rite of passing bearing great import, the doors of the vans would open and there within the sisters - bringing instant recall among the newly minted probates of the most nightmarish moments of their earliest ordeals. Along with their handlers they would be taken far afield - to areas outside of the organization's direct control - to areas of infiltration and experimental zones so clandestine that none outside of the highest echelon of

the organization knew of their existence, much less their names, geographical locations and designated purposes. By the time these child recruits were returned to the areas known and recognized as being within the sometimes invisible border of the organization's influence - in areas possessing known organizational strongholds - they were children no longer. Those from years before who may have remembered their disappearance, even suspecting that it was to the disciplinary dungeons of the commandant's training center into which they had been stolen, would in most cases never recognize in any way, shape or form those same living entities when they arrived back as full-blown sworn cult recruiters - though the cult recruiters would almost assuredly remember those from their own past and - as in Astrid's case - often to their detriment.

CHAPTER 12

Britta sat in the corner of the room giggling and rubbing her sex through the small v-shaped fabric covering it as Bluebird paced ominously back and forth across the floor of her personal quarters at the regional command center. Both of them had been assigned their own quarters at regional command as befitting their station - more prestigious dwellings to be established for them later once the dregs of the resistance had been crushed into the ground and an organization system of governance applied. Still, Britta in her youth and by dint of routine, having shared quarters during all of their time at the commandant's training center since they had been paired together – and with devotion to Bluebird inclusive - found herself more comfortable in the company of Bluebird rather than in the area which had been designated for her personally. The preference for closeness on this night was understandable as it had been a long and bloody day in the field and both of them were processing the genocide that they had witnessed in their own way.

Both of their personal pets - the breeding experiments for the re-population of the area - had been removed quickly once their personal carriers had returned to command - the vehicles traveling away from

the front lines at a speed which Bluebird herself did not realize the vehicles were capable of. Bluebird had stolen a glance behind her as they had exited the vehicles and proceeded up through the docking bay where they had endured their shared ordeal of the previous night. Nadezhda and Bonn were barely coherent as the internal security members unstrapped them from their place of bondage on the front of the mechanized carriers and were quickly surrounded by medical personnel in white lab coats who spoke in excited voices utilizing terminology beyond Bluebird's ability of reckoning and expertise. Britta had cried abjectly when she realized that Bonn would be taken into the medical area of command for a night of intravenous dosing of experimental and restorative chemicals under the watchful eye of the organizational doctors rather than being her personal source of amusement in her bedchambers. Her grieving - somewhat genuine, somewhat theatrical, yet every ounce manipulative - was quickly forgotten however in the haze of adrenaline and bloodshed that surged through her small body, and before long she was croaking deceptions, harsh admonitions and sensual promises to the internal security retinue which accompanied her and her elder sister toward the service door.

It was of those possible liaisons which Britta now considered and not diseased Bonn - the feel of one of their masculine leather-gloved hands upon one petite cheek of her posterior grasped in lust - she biting unfriendly on the striated contours of a muscular and battle-scarred chest. Any number of them were waiting for her even now, she knew, her giggling all the more in

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consideration of the same, they loitering in the long hallways just out of sight near the door to her chambers - at least two of them stationed directly on either side of the entrance to her temporary domicile and perhaps one within, guarding her demoness mask. Naked, suffused with the lust of thousands upon thousands of induced-trauma sessions back at the commandant's training center and the explosive blood-letting of the day before her - there in the darkness they would meet the real demoness - the psychotic child goddess who dwelt behind the mask.

Upon arrival back at command both Bluebird and Britta had been forcibly stripped naked and bathed with decontaminant chemicals and then subjected to high-intensity blasts of frigid water before being scrubbed down - Britta enjoying these ministrations despite their abrasiveness, Bluebird coldly enduring. During the scrubbing there had been several of the cult recruiters from the night before that had approached to assist however both of the girls had rejected them and they had slunk into the background, surprisingly timid and crestfallen in demeanor. The younger girl's reasons for opting for the internal security members to finish that task had been entirely sensual in intent - she responding with coos of delight and mirthful cackles as the men caressed her small body with sponges there in the field immediately adjoining the loading dock - her imagining what faces might lie beneath their anonymous visored masks and knowing that their sexual members were responding in kind reciprocally to her reactions both feigned and real. The one cult recruiter who had effected

Britta's initial orientation and transport from the outward outpost directly after the little girl's tryst with the field marshal those many months ago would assumed to be the most hurt by Britta's rejection, however a coy smile played on her mouth even as she was shooed away - knowing well that the burgeoning lust of her erstwhile charge would be best met in the ways that Britta herself thought best and knowing that she would be apprised of the events that had occurred at the front in due course, if not by recollection then in person.

The reason for Bluebird's rejection of the cult recruiters' ministrations had been entirely political in nature - perhaps more than political - even visceral. She had chaffed immediately upon arrival at regional command - in the way that she and her young sister had been treated from the onset and even more so had taken offense to the way in which the cult recruiters had dealt with them, in a fashion which she found condescending in the extreme.

Bluebird had always been independent - since her time as a scavenger in the deep wilderness that had been both her nature and her portion. Though she had not known it she had been handled with kid gloves once in the commandant's training center comparatively to the rank and file enlistments - this dynamic, for her implicit in the beginning, accelerated once becoming one of the, if not the, fastest to become a pontifex lording herself over the baby brigades and accelerated still further once her and Britta's shared destiny had been revealed to them on the wind-swept observation tower with hundreds of

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armed and lethal personnel beneath her on the parade grounds at her command. She sensed that the cult recruiters since her arrival and perhaps even in the final days back at headquarters had been engaged in certain unspoken machinations - for her in a titular sense but attempting to encroach upon her self-determination and the self-determination of the type of governance that she would wield once in the new territories.

Fell insights had been bequeathed to Bluebird the night before as she sat stripped and impaled upon that metal instrument of torture embedded within that rough wooden chair facing the image of the commandant. Though the cult recruiters themselves had facilitated the ordeal - against Bluebird's own wishes but to which she acquiesced - Bluebird knew that they had unwittingly in kind facilitated the instrument of their own doom. For in allowing Bluebird the depth of communion with the commandant directly - mind to mind - though in a contact for outside observances perhaps more astral than physical - the melding had been real and, through being instrumental in arranging such a direct contact, the downloading of consciousness, plots and agendas, sundry and suffuse, they had inadvertently cut themselves off once and for all, permanently and irrevocably, as gate-keepers to the commandant. Bluebird now dwelt within the commandant and the commandant dwelt within her - and the levels of download that had been accomplished betwixt those two in those darkest hours before dawn had positioned Bluebird in a higher status, higher and far above and beyond any that the most irascible of the cult recruiters

could ever hope to achieve.

Despite the fact that both of them had been thoroughly scrubbed as well as their garments changed, the telltale signs of blood smears from some of the victims that they had encountered on the field were present on both of their bodies - a reddish blush apparent here and there, a birthing mark of their inaugural foray into a territory hitherto unknown to them and a telltale hunter's blooding indicating more of what was to follow in the indeterminable time which extended before them. Despite their near total covering the blood had still seeped through - so grotesque was their foray into the territories earlier underneath the sunlit winter sky.

Britta, in keeping with her proclivity, had changed once thoroughly decontaminated into a second suit that was now her trademark - the obscenely revealing leather-strap constructed upper crossing shoulders and accentuating the incipient breasts still in a stage thoroughly latent. An equally revealing lower - the thin v-shape of leather barely covering her sex in the front, the one leathern strip situated and fully revealing the supple painfully young buttocks, still bearing residual signs of brutal and intensive punishments endured whilst at the commandant's training center, behind.

She had taken to the practice - since her and Bluebird's first direct confrontation with the commandant in the flesh, in those ultra-secret dungeons beneath dungeons beyond the torture center, beyond the training center - of wearing a black leather utility belt, a

vintage piece, worn by one of the internal police or guards in the former penitentiary on which the commander's headquarters was built - modified for her thin waist and cinched. On several carabiners which had been attached to either side she wore the instruments of her trade - punitive implements attached, traded out - sometimes one, sometimes several - chosen from her own personal stock and borne according to the dictates of her ever-increasing megalomania and psychosis. As she sat and idly watched Bluebird pacing to and fro across the base of her elder sister's chambers she cradled one such instrument in her hand, kneading it, caressing it - the other hand rubbing strongly against her sex over the leather covering it. Bluebird was the furthest from her mind as she did so, even as she stared at her with seemingly never-ending laughter upon her succulent reddish maniac lips. Britta yearned to disclose her fantasies to Bluebird - her thoughts concerning the liaisons which she would make later in the dead of night once back in her own personal chambers - the revelry that she had felt amidst the horrifying bloodshed and the bursts of yellowish poison bombs there on the field of carnage only hours before.

She longed to tell her older sister of the realizations that she had had since her own confrontation with the shade of the commandant during the ordeal the night before - the cold metal inserted into her stretched anus - so painful but so very pleasurable in a more than disturbed and confusing intermingling. How those realizations had calcified in reality as she felt the vibrations through her mechanized carrier as it crushed

the bodies of rebel children beneath its incessant rolling tread. How her apprehension had sharpened as the bullet-proof glass enclosure of her observation atop the vehicle caught the profuse spray of blood from burst bodies quartered and more, all and sundry, by the bioterror-laden shrapnel of bombs bursting in the cold winter air, deployed by forces which were unmitigatedly fanatic in loyalty to her person by the very dint of their creation. Yet, she held her silence as Bluebird made her turns about the chamber in grim contemplation - for she too knew that an even redder, even bloodier dawn would greet them on the morrow, beneath the unsettling dim glow of the radiation sun.

CHAPTER 13

As Astrid sat in the commandant's chapel in the presence of her sworn sisters - Chazona rumbling before her upon the altar - her two small treats, one in particular, shivering in premeditation of potential punishments that would come later in the night - she remembered what it had been like in the days past, that first long session inside the commandant's training center. The faces of the leering cult recruiters before her inhuman in countenance before the beating began - hours long in duration - as they crowded in before her unnaturally opened eyes - always berating from the periphery in voices only possible by the most vile biochemical transformations wrought within themselves, yet always allowing the center of her vision to be opened up to the image of the commandant who loomed down upon them all.

Chazona reminded her of these cult recruiters from her past in the state in which she was in, yet somehow seemed less than those that she had encountered during her own arduous march in those early days toward becoming a cult recruiter herself. Was it by dint of the fact that she had not accepted the sacrament upon entering the vestibule of the chapel - as she suspected

that Cora Beth also had not? Or was it instead because Chazona, as per the import of the early part of her speech, was also a product of the sort of degeneration that she herself had stated had occurred within the organization in the years since the apocalypse - was the power receding even in her?

Astrid remembered the feel of the thick leather strap upon her exposed and upturned buttocks, her physical body immobile by restraints holding her to the cross-beam, narcotic-soaked rag within her mouth as the cult recruiters shouted at her. She had been more fleshy than the other girls at her age then and had been self-conscious of her peers in those days before the commandant's training center (and in many days thereafter, even more so) however that self-consciousness as the leather was applied with crack upon resounding crack upon her naked flesh turned to terror consciousness - she became both the delta and the omega. The blows came down once, twice, a third and then again, again and again - only a few seconds' pause between as her increasingly reddened flesh quivered uncontrollably before the next slice landed, the thick and brutal leather strap wielded by an unseen cult recruiter with the strength of a beast and the predatory mindset of a high-tier sadist.

As her backside became ruined under those blows - reddened at first, black and purple even before the mid-point had arrived and beaten bloody by the end - she felt the unclean spirits surrounding the commandant enter her and her consciousness, enslaving whatever base consciousness remained. A severe state of dissociation

began to arise as in her hallucinatory state she began to imagine she herself as the commandant - the skintight black vinyl costume her own along with the giantess physicality which animated it being hers instead of the helpless six-year-old girl who lay strapped upon the torture apparatus as the blows rained down upon her naked flesh. Astrid could only barely sense the rivulets of blood dripping down her thighs as the beatings continued - the minutes turning into hours. The discipline continued almost without ceasing, usually less than a minute between the straps and then other instruments connected with her bared flesh - yet sometimes there would be pauses of five minutes or more, every hour or so. These would be the times when the appointed disciplinarians would be changed out, the insane witches vying for the opportunity to test their prowess and give the little girl the just desserts that a reception-level girl entering into the commandant's training center deserved, deciding which instrument of punishment they would wield - their own cruel touch of individuation. During these pauses Astrid would be surrounded to an even more harassing degree by the cult recruiters - screaming at her, hissing at her like feral beasts and whispering threats of molestation and impending doom, all utilizing and delivered through their horrific powers of voice modulation. Command prompts, brainwashing and invective cascaded into each other from the mouths of the harpies yet increasingly Astrid had begun to inhabit her own space and seemed to be beyond their touch - the dissociation becoming even more pronounced with each scream.

She had endured - those hours upon hours of cruel beatings during her inaugural reception being only the tip of the figurative iceberg to what she would endure in the intervening years to follow. And now, according to Chazona's announcement, the gauntlet had been laid at the feet of her and the other cult recruiters present. Effect the sacrifice - enter into the blood abyss of the commandant's most questionable mercies - distinguish oneself as a sister among sisters. Astrid was not of a mind to let the opportunity now presented pass her by. She had endured much at the hands of the cult recruiters and their lackeys since early childhood - sadism which passed beyond the pale of even the most imaginative members of the organization who had not had the singular experience of being among the disappeared - those whose black fate had led them far beyond the normative sectors of the organization. She and others like her among all others who had been resigned to a liminal hell from which there was no escaping sans graduation or death - they, Astrid felt, the alumni of the commandant's training center, were the genuine elite - the visceral, brutal elite amongst the elite.

The relative silence of the chapel was now highly charged - the only sound being the ephemeral, ghostly sounds of the cult recruiters flanking the altar who sounded their instruments in premeditated pace according to the biological nuances of Chazona's physical body - the slaves to her master. Astrid and Cora Beth both noticed the vacancy in the eyes of these younger sisters upon their arrival and especially since the commencement of the music. The thousand-yard

stares, the telltale signs of saliva dripping involuntarily from the corners of the mouths. They had all, one and to a woman been subjected to the senior witch's high-level hypnosis - captivated and held captive by a dominant will even as they performed their designated task within the proceeding.

Those few who had not imbibed the sacramental narcotic upon entering the vestibule, Astrid, who had made pretense of receiving the sacrament, as well as Elizabeth and Cora Beth amongst them, could tell that the other assembled sisters who had programmed for the occasion to the letter of the law were falling in synch with the funerary beats of the small drums, the lilt of the instruments stringed and air and the sombre chanting of the enchanted fellow sisters who, in trance, faced them from the sides of the altar. The lulling sounds of the instruments and the barely audible chanting lulled and pacified those who heard them - with every sound the attendants in the sanctuary were synchronizing with the biological dictates of the choir - Chazona's agents - and thus with Chazona herself.

Despite the fact that Cora Beth and Elizabeth had not imbibed the proffered sacrament or, at least in the case of Cora, not to the full degree - an act which they should have done, according to rote and protocol - they too were visibly falling under Chazona's spell - their attention wavering, falling into a liquid apprehension of their surroundings - their mission consciousness compromised. Only Astrid remained as the one among the number of the sisters who could effect the sacrifice.

Her fingernails dug into the skin of her palms creating bloodied half-moons - her hands held in fists pressed one against another resting at her waist upon the fabric of her robes. Even as the flashing memories of her earlier youth streamed through her mind, a sudden recall which she had not expected but drew power from nonetheless - controlled, directed - she kept her gaze steadily upon the figures directly before her on the altar, concentrating her vision in ever microscopic fashion upon the object that would facilitate her success and, perhaps, if Chazona's words were true, a stratospheric rise to power within the association of cult recruiters and the organization as a whole.

Chazona's face had now become barely humanoid in appearance - shifting, mutating then receding back into some vague semblance to the familiar face readily recognizable by the other members of the commandant's cult. Angry red splotches arose across her forehead, sunken cheeks and semi-exposed neckline even as her eyes increased in their now thoroughly inhuman purplish glow - her body chemistry altering itself in such a dramatic and violent fashion that a mere moment of indecision or faltering of concentration would surely bring about her bodily death. Yet there would be no such bodily death for Chazona on this night nor on the many nights to come - stretching forth like a writhing void abyss into the grim future - for she was a master manipulator, a sorceress of the highest-tier, and it was by her unyielding, unfaltering control that she held the sisters before her in thrall.

Astrid forced her gaze to drop away from Chazona

lower, towards the male opfer which knelt at the forefront of the altar - his emaciated and ruined physicality barely able to shift itself within its profound bondage under the weight of the heavy hauling chains which held him to the floor and connected him, on either side, to the plinths upon which sat the naked female children - Chazona's human statuary. In his weakened state of near immobility, chained and having been subjected to innumerable tortures beforehand, Astrid saw clearly the plug situated upon his neck - the metal cap surgically inserted surrounded by diseased and infected flesh which was the only impediment to the pulsing arteries beneath and an instant, horrific death.

Focusing with horrible concentration which caused every nerve ending within her body to scream out in protest, Astrid stared with an unholy intensity upon the opfer - the sounds of the chanters, the music and the presence of her fellow sisters all about her - including Chazona herself - falling into a peripheral haze, still present but unreal. Her only reality was blood, death and an indomitable will to power - force upon hideous force building within her, years of excruciating trauma-induced programming and resultant biological manipulation at the hands of the cult recruiters and the organization concentrating itself into a fine point and then - release.

Thick, stinking beads of sweat dripping down her face and emanating from every pore in her body turned to blood, streaking her visage in crimson as her body revolted against the extremity of what she, Astrid, was doing, yet - singular among all the sisters, or perhaps

trebled by the dint of their similar yet ultimately impotent efforts - she saw in the span of mere seconds that seemed like indescribable aeons passing the metal cap begin to slowly turn, turn and then at that critical point - utter carnage.

With the pressurized force of a bullet bursting from the barrel of a gun the cap upon the surgically implanted tube in the neck of the male chained to the altar shot forward and into the ranks of the cult recruiters, immediately followed by torrents of blood which anointed and baptized the bulk of them with a horrific arterial spray of blood and gore, as the careful razor's edge existence of the opfer was snapped in one fell motion effected by Astrid's murderous psychokinesis.

Astrid remembered little of the mayhem and bedlam that followed in the immediate aftermath - she physiologically wrecked by the effort, drifting in and out of waking consciousness and only held in standing position by the throb of the mass of cult recruiters who surged toward the stage. By that one act the spell of Chazona in that moment had been broken and so disrupted the order of the attendees, intoxicated almost to a person by the narcotic properties of the sacrament imbibed upon entering the chapel, who turned to chaos as they swarmed upon the altar. Black robes fluttering and then settling disturbingly the cult recruiters knelt to the opfer, him now entirely prone and surrounded by a grisly liquid pool as they fed with wild and reckless abandon - white teeth piercing into flesh growing paler and paler by the passing minutes due to its exsanguination, the sisters fighting amidst themselves

like vultures upon a corpse for the chance to depress their lips upon that most vulnerable point of bloodshed which Astrid alone had afforded them.

As the initial surge after the exsanguination of the opfer began at last to slow Astrid remembered the faces of multiple of the cult recruiters surrounding her - their eyes wide and maniacal to a very fault, their faces aglow with the cold sweat induced by the organizational narcotics and most of them with mouths bearing the grisly evidence of their feeding, faces still streaked with the splattered gore from the effected sacrifice. Her own visage was streaked with both his blood from the initial arterial spray as well as her own, the latter via internal ruptures which the brutality of her efforts had caused.

She felt hard fingers then, extending out from one of the black robes of the sisters which encircled her, rubbing wetly against her lips and beneath her nostrils as she too was now involuntarily dosed with the sacrament, the partaking of which she had earlier feigned but now possessed neither the strength nor reason to resist.

Astrid found that the sudden imbibement filled her once again with an unnatural strength, though there was no hypnotic presence for her to synchronize with as others had done with Chazona - the vigor that had flown from her in her hard actions now somewhat renewed as she was led, sometimes snarling and sometimes racked with insane laughter, out of the hall - to and then through a secret door on one of the far walls, a heavy black-slathered wooden door shutting behind her and blocking out the sounds of the other assembled sisters

beyond it still in the throes of their foul revelry.

Down winding stairs she was then led, two sisters whom she did not recognize accompanying her, the company of three proceeding single-file down the treacherous and narrow passage into one of the interior areas which Cora would have known but Astrid did not. The pressure in her head began to increase and she realized that the drug that had been placed upon her lips was not in fact the selfsame sacrament which the others had taken at the onset of the assembly and which she herself had also in many times prior but rather an enhancement of the same - possessing properties which she did not readily recall but which filled her with sensations most strange, as enlivening as they were unpleasant.

Rather by dint of the dosing or the intentful unnatural layout of the now subterranean infrastructure - perhaps both - Astrid found her mind drifting even as she walked apace with the custodians assigned to her, they who sometimes grasped her, and gently so, to steady her forward motion - her body still aching acutely from the implementation of her will which had set her upon a platform that would, should Chazona's words be true, set her feet firmly upon trajectories of clandestine organizational assignation well beyond that of her peers. She alone had effected the sacrifice - that was beyond question.

Shadows darkened as they descended and found themselves quickly upon the sprawl of one of the floors beneath the ground level of the chapel - the stairs ending though there were no doubt more secret passages,

leading even further to the areas below and the myriad horrors which likely occurred there. Before her long black hallways stretched out in multiple directions and large black flags covered the walls depicting images of the commandant engaged in various horrible pastimes - not the nearly identical representations of her which could be found from the commandant's training center to the small individual altars in far-flung areas of the organization's influence but instead far more explicit scenes reserved only for the highest-tier among the sisterhood.

Astrid found herself staring intently at these images which she had never before seen despite her long service as a cult recruiter - innovations she assumed were specifically for the chapels themselves and the witches who dwelt and served within them. The two cult recruiters who attended her hurried her along with an admonishment that she would in due course witness such sights herself and in real-time, however Astrid could not help but stare - her fascination trebled by dint of the narcotic which she had been administered - allowing her feet to be led along scheduled course by the arms of the sisters which grasped her while her eyes focused on the scenes drifting by her, emblazoning themselves within her mind despite the briskness of their pace.

Some featured the commandant engaged in the sort of activities which she knew took place within the dungeons beneath the commandant's training center - though depicted in such detail that they were all the same revelatory, she herself never having been taken

below, though she considered that that was indeed an opportunity which may soon be hers. In these depictions the commandant sometimes sat, her person flanked by black-masked internal security armed to the teeth to either side of her, beneath her female children in robes like that of the cult recruiters - her own personal assistants. Beyond these betwixt huge concrete support beams were situated large steel cages designed expressly for human captivity, inside of which naked children screamed as the small robed figures approached them holding within their hands devices of torment never before seen on the surface but wielded frequently and with reckless abandon and often terminal result there in the dungeons. In other scenes depicted upon the black flags the commandant herself took part - long hypodermic needles of monstrous proportions held by her own hand piercing into the necks and sometimes directly into the hearts of victims which she held aloft, their faces contorted in pain and abject terror, some of them so young that they were not yet ambulatory - another layer of the commandant's unbreachable bondage, another indicator of her satanic cruelty. In others the commandant stood before long tables, strewn with a grisly array of intestines and other offal, upon which surface lay howling infants which she leisurely tore apart, limb from limb, her hands sheathed in shining black vinyl - the only instruments she needed or required for a culling so tender, yet so full of dark desire.

The flags of this nature were situated in the early parts of the hall upon which she now tread, however as Astrid proceeded further along she noticed that the

scenes became altogether more bleak and horrific in nature - as the venues in which the art was set moved from the large arena areas within the commandant's dungeons to areas more intimate and secret still. Black cells, confined quarters replete with all manner of instruments of discipline, punishment and torture - beast barracks containing her own kith and kin - places found along the farthest corridors of the most inaccessible areas of the dungeons, existing behind industrial grade doors fitted with the most secure locking mechanisms still maintained and operated within the post-nuclear territories maintained by the organization. Others situated behind false panels and secret passageways, staging areas for the most horrific of acts.

Astrid's eyes crinkled in involuntary delight as her mind absorbed the scenarios which the scenes presented - models hitherto inconceivable to her - frontiers of blasphemy of the flesh, zeniths of torment in the extreme that even by the very viewing there upon the black flags initiated her to a level which she had not accessed before. The cult recruiters who grasped either side of Astrid's arms were also filled with delight, though their expressions were hidden - knowing well what Astrid was experiencing in that very moment.

Then the atmosphere of the black flags began to change once again - their content no longer depicting predicaments within the commandant's dungeons and the secret chambers which were honeycombed throughout, but rather insignias - semiotic representations likewise unfamiliar within Astrid's

purview until then. In these, some insignia being of black projects while others represented clandestine units within the command, the commandant featured predominantly as did intimated agendas centered on domination on the planetary level - the disease of the post-apocalyptic earth, certainly, yet also the groaning toward even further vistas of possible horror - a sole black finger of the commandant piercing the veil of galaxies and penetrating into black abysses far beyond the known universe. Planets crushed upon planets and entire worlds were eaten.

CHAPTER 14

"Don't you like it to be sliced open, little filth?" The man whimpered as the little girl, dressed in a black cowl from the depths of which shone pale, milky luminescent eyes, waved the shining surgical saw slowly back and forth in front of his face as he lay bound on a metal gurney in the basement room of the regional command headquarters.

Britta enjoyed playing these games in her spare time while Bonn was busy undergoing the necessary experiments with medical staff, preparations for breeding. She had found more than ample playthings for her to enjoy within the live populace left of the area recently taken by organizational forces with her and her older sister Bluebird at the helm. For now, a mature man of twenty-some-odd years was her object of attention and dread exploration.

Far from spurious was the reasoning by which the organization had deemed this an "experimental" area - for the mood which prevailed was anything but normal, even by organizational standards.

Beyond the central administration area there was a no-man's land of burned-out forests - dead trees and barely living, blackened pine-bark spires rising up in half-life toward the dread grey sky above. Beneath these testaments of the commander's martial wrath was a

ground thoroughly charred and scorched - with all remaining natural floor of dead leaves and straw and the random stagnant pool covered and choking beneath a yellow dust of poison. Further still into the wood, several miles in, the forest began to thicken and spread for miles in several directions toward what were even in the time before the nuclear war extremely rural climes situated on and across the line of what was formerly a state border.

The internal security units attached to the campaign had marked the immediate entrance to the no-man's land first with some crude handmade signage made on-the-spot, utilizing appropriately alarmist slogans and wording and even here and there had dragged some of the dead logs straight across to indicate a border in hopes that the shock troop regiments would get the picture and stay well away. As the case may be however, the titular barriers erected by internal security did little to persuade the shock troopers who enjoyed using the cover of forest to drag the unfortunate young sons and daughters of the former resisters under its boughs for their own perverse ministrations. Around a third of those so engaging would be found the next day by internal security or chemical warfare attaches to the campaign, both properly attired in protective suits, lying beneath one of those black-barked pines, their skin peeling back from their faces and their own organs visibly beginning to seep from their ears, mouth and nostrils.

The other two-thirds of those who made it into the forest and managed to make it back out again were almost always permanently damaged to the point that

they would either be surged to a suicide squad if they were fit enough for any action, recommended for a ceremonial self-sacrifice if further gone and in many cases simply propped up against the back of a barracks building and fed some cocktails of narcotics in liquid and other forms and left to slowly wither away. If not so lucky they would simply be dragged out into a peripheral area and have their throats slit, their bodies left for the buzzards which were the only living entities in the area with the stomachs and constitution strong enough to feed on so tainted a meat.

Britta had been fascinated by this area - only a few clicks' walk up from the regional command center - yet the policing of the two death goddesses in relation to this cordoned-off area was more perspicaciously and intensely applied at this early juncture than it was for the shock troopers who had sought some illicit succor within its highly questionable depths. On more than a few occasions Britta had thought that she had seen a small black figure moving in and out of the trees, sometimes accompanied by a strange, floating light. Despite her gleeful curiosity she had not been permitted forward movement, nor had the internal security personnel accompanying her seemed keen on investigating further of their own volition.

For now though her attention was turned elsewhere - toward the painfully thin man bound in leather restraints resting upon the metal gurney.

She had been torturing him slowly for hours - perhaps more psychologically than physically - though

his physicality was already undergoing its own very harsh internal ordeals as he was suffering the effects of the contaminants which had been unleashed upon the area in prodigious quantities during the course of the campaign. Despite this, his body appeared at least on visual observation to be relatively clean - had it not been so she would have no doubt been dissuaded from too much up-close and personal time with the same.

Her lust for local flesh was nearly insatiable - though she had by dint of convenience and preference satiated herself with the varied organizational personnel there in regional headquarters for the most part - a mixture of her own personal unit, internal security and shock troops. She had attempted on several occasions to seduce members of Bluebird's own unit but a sound smacking from her older sister and a threatening admonition had hurt her feelings and dissuaded her from further flirtation - though she prided herself on the occasional surreptitious sly glance here and there, especially when they were reciprocated.

Britta was dressed in the strange rubberized black robe which she had worn upon her arrival to regional command and although she preferred simply wearing the garments underneath - revealing as they were and thus suited to her purposes - the inside of command was chilly for her slight frame and the monk's robe with its protective qualities also was protectant against infection when experimenting with the locals. Although she knew that the black rubber robes were appropriate and despite the fact that she preferred them for comfort as much as anything as the winter wore on she still enjoyed playing

games with the internal security assigned to her - insisting that she be granted entrance to her own torture chamber in which one or more contaminated local males awaited her while dressed only in her black leather underthings. She enjoyed it as they pleaded with her, reasoned with her, while always staying far clear from being condescending - the latter, a very dangerous thing. She would argue with them insistently - moving from the fey and petulant to the grandiose and psychotic fluidly - utilizing her strange alterations of voice which she had learned during her zenith training in the commandant's training center. The personnel member who played sweetest, whose counter-arguments were most convincing and who elicited the most fright at the potential consequences of her wrath would be the winner - the victor also chosen on the basis of who she intuited was also, despite the trying circumstances, involuntarily beguiled by the inherently sadistic contours of her flesh. It was that fortunate organization personnel who would be called upon for private audience by the little death goddess in due course.

As the gleam of Britta's surgical saw caught the gleam of the spotlight directly above the gurney the bound man began to gibber wildly, futilely attempting to thrash his body against the leather straps which held him fast to the cold metal. Britta cackled loudly at the man's discomfiture - her cackling slowly churning into the sound of some black metallic grinding and then into an inhuman shrieking as she locked her eyes, wide and burning with mania, onto that of her victim before bringing the razor-sharp surgical item down and

forward, across, back and then forward against sawing into the man's genitalia. His own screams of agony melded with the shrieks of his tormentor as the saw did its grim work - blood spraying several feet into the air and to the sides as an artery was severed - adorning Britta's contorted face and black robe with minute flecks of gore. Within minutes the man passed out in shock - his organs beneath the belt line destroyed and hemorrhaging - fat droplets of his lifeforce now splattering at a regular and alarming pace upon the cement floor beneath. As the man began to slowly die Britta's screams also died, her medusa's face changing into the sweetly deceptive smile of a young girl. With one gloved hand she wiped some of the blood from her cheeks and forehead, smearing it in the process. Thusly blooded, Britta moved toward the door and beyond - a selection amongst her minders to satiate the other lust that had been steadily building inside her.

CHAPTER 15

Lethal units of internal security swept down from the hillside just as the first rays of light began to filter down through the trees of the eastern ridgeline. This was a small, pathetic part of the sovereign settlement - made to establish themselves on the peripheral area of the village in the more decrepit and ramshackle dwellings. Even in the areas outside of the organization's control the inevitable yearnings for society and placement had begun to be instituted. For the sovereigns these people on the periphery were the furthest down the ladder and, as such, potentially useful for incoming organizational forces.

The first volley of warheads had rained down the day prior and most of the entire region was now covered in the foul, yellowish residue of the biochemical weapons which had been deployed. Smoke from burning buildings wafted thickly on the winter air and the sounds of children crying, the moans of the critically injured and the sounds of armed carriers engaging in preparatory training maneuvers melded seamlessly with the incongruous sounds of roosters crowing and penned-up swine grunting in seemingly hopeless premeditation

of a morning slop. Dead bodies were piled like cordwood along the sides of the bombed-out dwellings - sacrificial victims of the organization's martial carnage of the day before. This was the country - Bluebird country.

A thin, ragged-looking sovereign out early to tend to the livestock shouted a warning as he spied the masked, black-clad organization forces swarming down the hill. Before the cry had ceased the internal security personnel closest to the hill's base raised his weapon, a copy-cat MAC-10 machined in the organization's own factories, letting out a blast of automatic fire that made the lone sovereign seem to dance in place for several seconds before crumpling lifelessly to the ground - blood pooling around him from multiple smoking wounds. The live sovereigns still left, survivors from the previous day's campaign, heard the cry of warning followed by what sounded like a hauling chain being fed into a piece of machinery - the telltale sign of one of the organization's oiled and deadly meat-grinders being put to task. Listlessly the sovereigns began to exit the buildings, hands raised in surrender.

They were a sad-looking lot - some of them already showing hot flesh and suppurations that indicated that they had taken direct hits from the blasts, belying the fact that they had been near the front during the fighting. These were separated from the rest - marched off into the forest by a small contingent of internal security which broke off from the main part of the force. Depending on how close to the terminal level each individual was, some of them would be processed into organizational reeducation - punitive, experimental squads utilized for

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the most grueling and back-breaking manual labor that would be necessary as the area began to be rebuilt and reformed according to organizational specifications. Some of them, closer to death, would be summarily executed then and there.

The remaining sovereigns left before the main company were lined up by the internal security members - one of the latter, a medical attache, approaching each one individually and checking them physically to ascertain their respective level of health.

As an unintended consequence of their relative shunning by the larger community these individuals living in the periphery had not been as affected by the warheads due to both range and intent, a silver lining which would cause much suffering for their erstwhile domestic oppressors in the days to come.

"Get some of these bodies to the hogs!" barked one of the internal security members to a couple of the more stout and hearty captives who had been cleared by the medical liaison.

Although it was winter it was, as the case may be, still a southern winter and as such the piles of dead bodies were already starting to emit a nauseating stench and the flies had begun to gather.

Two organization men, one armed with a large and razor-sharp surgical saw, accompanied the former sovereigns to the nearest pile of corpses, dragging them ever nearer to the hog pens to hack them into workable pieces fit for the swine's consumption. This was both a hygienic as well as highly practical option, for the

corpses needed disposing of and the hogs, as hogs were wont to do, needed to eat. In time, so hoped all, the hogs would be eaten as well - for all in the border region now under the administration of the two young death goddesses whether it be friend, foe or four-legged creature would be living in an environment with an increased level of toxicity. As a comparison to this level had not been encountered since the times before the nuclear wars the potential consequences were generally unknown - a matter for a high and intensive level of speculation by the organization's military planners.

Though the peripheral sovereigns who were being presently examined would in short order be utilized as an internal repressive dynamic leveraged against the loyalists, the true fifth columnists had already been evacuated by special intelligence prior to the onset of the campaign. With heavily armed gunmen from internal security standing point, a select number of the most perspicacious informants had been spirited out in the night and taken back to regional command via a circuitous route through the forest. Once arrived they began an intensive debriefing and inaugural orientation and indoctrination - the first time any of the individuals had been within an organization installation despite the fact that many of them had been serving the mission of the commander - in a covert capacity - for years. This in itself was extremely heady on a psychological level and the special intelligence personnel who had been tasked for the extraction and the debriefing respectively were the best and brightest that the intelligence sector of the organization had to offer - responsible for the meticulous

arrangements commensurate to the informants' treason coming at long last to full flower.

As the fifth columnists were processed the intelligence members who were the administrators of this peculiar demographic were very aware of the intrinsic value possessed by each and every one of them - just as they were well aware of the potential for value that these in turn could and would bring to the surface among those possessed of a lesser disloyalty to the sovereigns or a prior unwillingness to act in full capacity upon the level of treachery which had been afforded them.

Unlike many of the lesser regimes of the old world existent before the nuclear wars, those regimes who placed such a premium on loyalty as a virtue - or at least as a hollow byword, even if often somewhat or entirely empty in import - the commander loved a traitor - particularly when it served purposes all his own, even to the most fratricidal of ends.

Whilst the traitor, denuded of all semblance of moral scruples, had been relegated to the ninth level of hell in the literature of old - a theme fortified by religious teachings of the time and carried through society and shadow society both criminal and governmental - the commander had always recognized treason as a sign of dread autonomy, a quality of someone black and amoral in character and highly motivated in seeking the conduits, methods and patrons which would facilitate chaos.

It was, in fact, exactly those sort of black operators - and their clients, the latter, enchanted in their own

miasma of false and worthless morality - who had been able to facilitate that utmost chaos of a historicity most dread indeed, the nuclear wars themselves, and all the horrific carnage that had followed and still followed long after - all links in a chain of terror.

CHAPTER 16

She was a delectable little girl and the lieutenant was suffused with lust upon first seeing her - just over four feet tall, thin as a whip and more than six months into her fifth year. He found her rummaging in the pile of rubble near the perimeter of the martial encampment - large stacks of burned-out shell casings, polished and shining in the process of being prepared for repurposing set beside treacherous mountains of debris from the buildings that had been destroyed in the campaign. Wendy had been wandering more and more in recent days and the lieutenant believed that the evil spirits of the area were affecting them differently, both in their own special way. She had salved the stressors of adjusting to the strange new environs by walking further and further within the surrounding wilderness. He found solace in stalking inside the immediate borders of the occupied area for vulnerable human prey.

The little girl heard the crunching of the lieutenant's boots upon the cold frost-covered leaves covering the ground and froze where she stood - crouched precariously atop a concrete slab where she had been angling for some worthless bauble lodged down between the rubble.

The lieutenant smiled sadistically beneath his thick black mustache, removing a cigar from the breast pocket of his jacket, clenching it between his teeth and lighting it in long deep draws - wreathing his visage in thick blue smoke. With one hand the lieutenant gestured to the girl to come down and she could do little but obey - carefully crawling down the rubble on all fours like some small beast until she reached the ground then walking with quaking tread toward the black-clad figure which loomed before her.

The lieutenant felt himself begin to involuntarily salivate and it was all he could do to restrain himself from molesting the child then and there. He felt a harsh telepathic command within his mind at that very moment however that warned him against such a course of action - the area around them seeming to turn darker all of a sudden and the sickening feel of Gaubni's unseen hand upon his shoulder. The lieutenant smiled to himself insanely, thrilled at the touch of his deity, the quarry cornered before him and the apprehension of unlimited possibilities and avenues of dread exploration that lay ahead.

"Come to me, girl!" the lieutenant barked.

The small figure approached him - trembling uncontrollably from head to foot. The lieutenant, sure in his purpose, closed the gap between them and wrapped a muscular arm around the girl's shoulder. Still shaking, the small girl raised her gaze to look into the face of the one who had accosted her - the eyes that stared back at

her were bloodshot, flecked with blood and burning with a rage inhuman and indescribable. Without conscious will a scream rose from deep within her throat and then erupted - high-pitched and shrill - echoing across the dead secluded landscape. A few black-masked internal security personnel appeared in the distance on the ridgeline and gazed apathetically through their individual single black lens of vision at the two figures below with only mild curiosity. They knew the lieutenant - not personally but by dint of reputation - and they knew his propensities, mirror visions of their own though he possessed them to a much stronger degree than they. With a final look the small group turned and disappeared back over the hill. With their disappearance the small girl knew that there would be no rescue from whatever fate now awaited her.

"There, there, little one," the lieutenant whispered harshly, cradling the girl's tear-streaked face in his hand. Her sobs tapered off slowly into hiccuping chokes and the lieutenant waited patiently for her to calm - smoking his foul-smelling cigar - coldly considering the paces he would put her through, methodically, once his smoke was done.

Beyond the treeline, unseen by them both, Wendy surveilled them silently - her coal-black hair and black baby brigade uniform blending near seamlessly amidst the charred earth, blackened tree bark and shadow. She could not sense whether the lieutenant would desire her own company or assistance in whatever dread ministrations he had planned for the young girl with whom he now stood. Was it in the service of the Great

Demon that he had captured her thus or rather a chance encounter by which, in his psychopathology, he might avail himself of indulging his own sadistic tendencies?

Wendy smiled to herself - probably a bit of both, she considered. As she smiled she continued to surveil them from afar - the girl especially - who she could tell was perhaps a bit younger than herself, but still relatively close in age. Did she have any idea what lay in store for her? Wendy thought not but decided it would be fun in this particular situation to continue to observe covertly rather than insert her presence, perhaps unwanted, and possibly provoke her husband's rage. No, she was quite comfortable as she was now, hidden - the watcher - surreptitious witness to what was to come. She would have more than ample time to enjoy her husband, amongst each other's sole company alone, later in the night. Despite the brutality she had experienced during their long trek shadowing the organizational troops to the front - a diadem ordeal which encapsulated the violent build-up of events that had occurred at the commander's headquarters - the lieutenant's lust for her was as strong as ever, stronger even, perhaps, than when they had first met those many months ago in the mountain fastness that had been her home. No, she would not bother her husband and his prey but rather see - observe - learn. The thought of what hitherto clandestine insights she might gain into the proclivities of the lieutenant thrilled her and also excited her on a sexual level. Pondering the possibilities she nearly erupted into a fit of giggling but clamped her hand over her mouth, stifling any sound as she spied the lieutenant

in the distance taking one last draw from the heel of his cigar then crushing it out under his boot. He grasped the little girl beside him by the nape of her neck - a position in which anyone, especially one so tender in years, would have ready apprehension of the fact that even a fraction of a pound more of applied pressure could break the neck like a chicken. Thusly situated, the lieutenant began walking the whimpering girl toward the edge of the forest and, within, Wendy began crawling steadily backwards on all fours, tactilely and tactically removing herself toward a more concealed vantage point.

The sovereign girl was a starved creature, dressed in an old homespun one-piece dress of indistinguishable color that sat just above her bony, scuffed knees. Her feet were covered in a threadbare moccasin-type garment - strips of fraying fabric wrapped about the feet and cinched with a knot at the ankles. Her attire reminded Wendy more than a little bit of the way she herself had been attired back at the engineering center before the lieutenant had entered into her life.

Despite the harsh journey from the commander's headquarters to the front Wendy had managed to keep her own sable-black baby brigade uniform in near meticulous condition - the lieutenant had even managed to procure for her a second uniform from the main supply depot while at headquarters, which she kept in an organization-issued rucksack along with her other meager belongings, switching out her dress alternately on a weekly basis. Her black uniform was, as was the case with many other members of the organization, an

integral aspect of identity, for Wendy even more so, for it stood as a symbol of her own great contrast between the impoverished and obscure existence of her past at the engineering center to her present status and, as such, the black uniform was a sign of her own dark ascent.

The lieutenant and his prey had now entered the woods proper and Wendy watched from her new and more secure area of concealment as her husband marched the sovereign at a brisk pace toward a small clearing, nearly causing the girl to trip several times as she double-timed it through the brush in an attempt to keep the pace that her captor was setting. As the two entered the clearing and Wendy watched from the distance, a deep hush came over the forest - the already near silent winter wood becoming devoid of all sound except for that of the lieutenant and his captive. There was an unnatural tone to the quietude - a lifelessness. Both Wendy and the lieutenant knew what the cause of the sudden shift in atmosphere indicated, both of them knew the presence that the telltale signs heralded. The Great Demon was coming and in his fullness.

A cold sweat broke out on the bodies of the two within the clearing despite the wintry climate. Plumes of steam emanated from the mouth of the little girl who, sensing the presence as well and knowing by dint of the fact that their march had now ceased that dreadful things were in store, had begun to hyperventilate almost uncontrollably. The lieutenant had released his grasp on her neck and as her panic increased and she considered the possibility of making a run for it - further into the forest or back toward the direction of the encampment -

she froze, suddenly.

A rushing cold wind blew once, twice and a third time over the company - so strong that it caused the dead leaves on the floor of the clearing to swirl several feet into the air, the foliage of the trees rustling violently and their trunks creaking as they swayed. The wind carried with it a nauseating, foul smell - so foul that it could not be mistaken for the still-burning bodies of the organization casualties nor the proto-industrial endeavors of the shock troops on the far side of the encampment.

As the wind subsided there came a hideous growling from further in the woods - a deep, guttural sound - the direction from which it came indeterminable. The sovereign girl began to cry as the lieutenant, his lips peeled back in a deranged and animalistic baring of teeth, grasped her honey-blonde hair in his hands and flung her to the ground.

Smelling the unnatural odor of rotting, hot flesh permeate the area - the bestial growling all around her - Wendy watched intently as the lieutenant fell upon the sovereign, her body pinioned to the ground and immobile beneath his far greater mass.

Mimicking the growling of the great Demon with a snarl of his own the lieutenant removed a large combat knife from a sheath strapped upon his thigh - the blade black, serrated on one side and on the other a quarter-inch thick line of deadly exposed steel running upward along its length exposing its razor edge. With a single motion the lieutenant slit a jagged cut through the little girl's dress from hem to neckline revealing pale, smooth

naked flesh beneath.

Gazing down at the sobbing figure, her cheeks reddened and moistened with tears, a lust now trebled rose through the lieutenant as he began to run both of his hands over the girl's naked body, his dominant hand still grasping the blade with which he had disrobed her. Her skin was entirely unmarred by the attack that had finally subsided around one week prior, the lack of the unmistakeable signs of exposure to the biochemical weapons that had been deployed by the organization, marking her as a daughter of one of the peripheral people, or perhaps an orphaned scavenger that had wandered in from further across the border.

The purity of her countenance excited the lieutenant, as did her fear.

He stuck the knife into the earth of the ground beside them and repositioned himself and his victim, her back on the ground but legs up in the air and spread-eagled, her cloth-wrapped feet, now the only clothing still on her body, resting on either of the lieutenant's shoulders, lifted up toward the sky. The lieutenant removed his hardened member, now throbbing for release, and thrust it betwixt her legs - she howling as her virginal hymen broke, bloodied - he screaming in abject mania as the girl's sex grasped his own and the roaring of the Great Demon surrounding them reaching deafening levels.

Sensing a telepathic command from the demon, the lieutenant withdrew, coming to his feet and dragging the girl up with him by the hair, wrapped around and twisted within his fist.

Controlling her by the hair he brought her up then forced her partially down so that she was situated on her knees. With his free hand he shoved two fingers into the sovereign's mouth, digits covered with soot and grime and the telltale signs of dried blood beneath his fingernails. The little girl's mouth was hot, wet and pliable and, having effected its opening, he slowly inserted the length of his very erect member within, choking out her screams. As the sovereign's small red lips clamped over the lieutenant the only sound that remained in the clearing was that of the demon and the small, wet sucking as the naked sovereign orally stimulated the organization martinet closer and closer to climax.

From her vantage point within a dense copse of stunted, twisted trees, Wendy grinned and silently clapped her hands together in time with the thrustings of her husband as his dominant hand, still grasping and twisting the blonde locks of the sovereign, brought her forward, back, forward, back and forward again. The girl's lips were puckered as they wrapped around the lieutenant, pink, moist, and glistening - her eyes closed and her tear-streaked face flushed.

With one final, brutal thrust the lieutenant released his grasp on the girl's hair, his entire body shaking in violent orgasm. A faint coughing sound emitted from the throat of the sovereign, her parted mouth dripping with the lieutenant's thick, white, viscous ejaculate. The girl's eyes slowly opened and, as they did so, the lieutenant received, at long last, the signal from the Great Demon

for which he had been waiting.

With a lightning fast gesture the lieutenant's hands shot down and wrapped about the girl's neck, thin and brittle under his vice-like grip. With a swift and lethally efficient motion the lieutenant applied pressure on either side of her neck and with a sickening crunch the neck was broken, the windpipe punctured. The little girl's naked body quivered, a last ragged gasp of air expelling from her throat, causing some of the glistening semen to expectorate involuntarily, dripping slowly down her chin.

Her physical life ended, the small body crumpled to the ground, her shoulders catching the fall and causing her head to tilt backward, mouth opened and dead eyes staring upward at the cragged, blackened limbs of the forest trees and the bleak expanse of the iron grey sky beyond.

As the last breath of life exited the sovereign girl a strange change came over the atmosphere of the forest clearing. The growling of the Great Demon had ceased suddenly, immediately after the lieutenant had broken the girl's neck. Now the air became colder still and a disquieting silence fell. From the open mouth of the corpse a shining, spectral orb emerged slowly then hovering, suspended in space some five feet above where the girl's dead body lay in repose.

From her distant vantage point Wendy's mouth hung open in shock as the glowing orb hovered above the corpse - the light violent and unnaturally luminescent to the point that the lieutenant had to take several steps

backward from where the murder had taken place, shielding his eyes with one hand, his face a mixture of myriad volatile emotions in apprehension of a phenomenon hitherto unknown and unprecedented in his many years within the organization and near as many as a cult follower of Gaubni. He had sacrificed hundreds of children in the intervening years since he had first sealed himself to the cult, there in the tunnel in the mountains in the region of Wendy's birthplace, however never had he seen anything remotely similar to what he was now witnessing in the immediate aftermath of having taken the life of an innocent in service to his patron demon.

The orb of light pulsed once, twice and then a third time before from within it came a sound - a hideous, mocking laughter. Upon hearing it Wendy pressed her fist into her mouth to keep herself from screaming and the lieutenant himself shuffled several feet backward from the scene again - for the voice was none other than the girlish shade of the one whom he had recently dispatched from her mortal coil. The same voice - recognizable, youthful, yet also changed - interdimensional in timbre, angry, ghostly and exceedingly malicious in nature. The sovereign girl had been the lieutenant's sacrifice - yet now she was Gaubni's own child.

With a sudden, unnerving speed the orb darted into the forest, carrying with it the ghostly laughter. Heedless now of whether or not the lieutenant would discover her surveillance, Wendy burst forth from her concealment among the twisted trees, hurtling after the shade of the

sacrificial victim as it sped past her, outstretched hands wildly and recklessly parting a way through the underbrush as she followed after it.

The lieutenant ignored the sound of his young bridge chasing through the forest after the shade of his erstwhile victim - unaware and uncaring of any sounds excepting the mocking laughter of the recently discorporate.

With the memory of the same still ringing in his ears the lieutenant pulled free his combat knife from the earth, still positioned where he had shoved it into the ground after his disrobing of the sovereign. His face had become deathly pale, his eyes bulging in shock. Falling to his knees before the corpse, a harsh scream erupted from deep within him as he directed the blade which he wielded to fall again and again, piercing the small child's lifeless body. Blood sprayed upward covering the lieutenant's face in a reddish mist from veins still pressurized, the once unmarred and cream-colored skin which had so inflamed his lust now covered in lacerations and increasingly bearing resemblance to meat in the process of being butchered. Yet there was no succor in the mutilation, for even as he ceased stabbing and started to carve hideous sigils into the dead flesh, that of his patron and other related entities amidst the black pantheons of organization cults, he still could not feel the presence of the Great Demon. There was none of the dark ecstasy which he had felt in the past after each and every sacrifice and even after other acts of devotion, still pointedly performed, those that did not involve a sacrificial conclusion.

In desperation the lieutenant turned the dead body of the little girl over, laying it face-down on its stomach and began to cut off ample slices of flesh from the hips and back. Holding the flesh upward, bloody and quivering in his shaking hands, he began to mutter chants and entreaties to Gaubni in a strange tongue, a black speech engineered by some intrepid social scientist within special intelligence for the questionable benefits of subscribing cultists. He held the strips of butchered flesh higher aloft still, the blood dripping upon his face turned upward to the firmament. Still there was no sign, no indicator of the Great Demon's disposition towards the sacrifice.

As if on cue, invisible and disconcerting, the lieutenant ceased his chanting which had, after the passing of some minutes, degenerated into incomprehensible muttering, the catechisms which he had memorized cascading one into the other until whatever meaning they may have once meant to carry were lost.

From deep within the forest he heard once again the laughter that had haunted him - so shrill, so inhuman in timbre. The bloody flesh began to drop involuntarily from the lieutenant's hands onto the ground as the lieutenant's muscular control gave way as he realized, in horror, that there were now two voices within the wood - both sets of girlish laughter now familiar, yet one much more familiar than the other. The lieutenant's mouth hung agape in terror, his flesh crawling. Wendy!

CHAPTER 17

Bluebird sat at a large desk beneath harsh radiant lights, her mouth curled back in a grimace, putting pen to paper which would authorize the first of hundreds of gruesome deaths enacted under her administration. Behind her hung a large banner – a blue insignia of human starburst upon a white field.

Nothing would stop the forward march of her dominance over the new experimental area, Bluebird herself would personally see to it. She had been aware these many months that one of the witches who had been sent in an advance party to regional command was no ordinary sister but in fact a hand-picked, empowered and clandestine emissary of the cult recruitment leadership apparatus back at the commander's headquarters. Blending in with the other cult recruiters at regional command, never appearing to give orders and for all effective purposes presenting herself as a lesser among their ranks - unobtrusive, out-of-sight, out-of-of mind.

The deception incensed Bluebird all the more, however what the witches apparently did not know was that she had her own informant amongst their number as

well - unless her spy was being run as a double-agent against her. Whatever the vagaries of intrigue might exist Bluebird now knew for a fact that the cultists had installed an implicit control in her territory surreptitiously and that the activities of said control were still being run in such a way as to indicate deception - a desire for concealment. Bluebird was fanatically committed to unearthing the exact methods that the cult recruiters were utilizing to undermine her - the ways in which they sought, an iron fist ensconced in silken glove, to embed their own power apparatus alongside her own - moving at an equal pacing, even somewhat slower at times as to not attract undue suspicion yet diverging, distorting at crucial intersections - their purposes subversive.

Already Bluebird had been apprised, not through the auspices of her top echelon informant but rather by the observation of a common shock trooper assigned to an infrastructural construction brigade, that the cult recruiters were in the process of building a chapel on the outskirts of the territory in the northwestern region. Why had the cult recruiters not informed her themselves of this development - if its purpose and design was not in fact contrary to her own? Why did Bluebird - the dictator of the realm - not hear a request spoken from the mouth of one of the witches themselves instead of learning of the project from an organizational shock trooper having observed - and rightly reported - unauthorized construction up to and including diversion of members of Bluebird's own workforce under false pretense?

While the cultists' secret emissary kept her head down - exerting influence via hidden means, an entire modus operandi specifically and unequivocally designed to avoid detection at all costs, the inauguration of the construction of a commandant's chapel there in the northwest was brazen, reckless. How did the cult recruiters think that Bluebird's administration would fail to register such a major project underway, not only done without due permissions but without even giving a cursory notice? Either it was a purposefully enacted provocation to gauge reaction or else the cult recruiters' opinion of Bluebird was so low that they thought she simply wouldn't notice a project of this magnitude happening right under her very nose. Both options, provocation and insult, enraged her.

Bluebird rose from the desk and began pacing the length of her administrative chamber, the pile of signed death warrants stacked high with signatures still fresh upon the mottled faux wood-grain surface. Her mind roiled with plots - varied possible routes of action that could be pursued in furtherance of her intended preliminary measures in rectification of the problems that the cult recruiter agent had presented her with.

Here and now was a very sensitive time in the experimental area - the region so vulnerable and more than amply tenderized by the wholesale genocide of the vast majority of the population during the organization's military campaign subduing the region. That many more beyond the first dead now slowly dying by dint of the creeping death facilitated by the slow but extremely tenacious nature of the chemical and biological

poisoning which had inundated the area.

The apparatus of power was now pliable - yet the mold which was set now, once hardened, would mark the precedence for which the territory would be administered by organizational power for decades to come.

Should Bluebird fail to consolidate a stranglehold on the area in the immediate present alongside Britta then her efforts would be compromised from the onset. To correct an imbalance in power dynamics further down the line, the problem having then festered considerably during the interim, would require a much more frightening level of applied pressure and an entirely new level of internal bloodshed - the necessary human assets to accomplish such which might not even be available to her at such an eventual point. No - if Bluebird wished to secure the destiny of her and her sister now was the only possible time - the only possible option.

As such, inserted alongside the death warrants for the surviving sovereigns who had been identified as posing problems to her regime, she had also inserted the names of the infrastructural foremen who had been co-opted in the construction efforts toward erecting the commandant's chapel. Along with these she had in a like fashion sentenced to death a number of the expert builders, the skilled technicians without whose presence the project would soon grind to a sudden and ignominious halt. With absence of the foremen, chaos would ensue among the laborers and - with most enthusiastic acquiescence from Britta - her little sister had agreed to pay a visit astride her mechanized carrier

the very next day to provide diversions of a fleshly nature which were a surety to hammer the nail into the figurative coffin of the cultists' unauthorized scheme.

The witches would almost assuredly notice at once and along with their apprehension of the sabotage underway readily ascertain the source. Such was entirely intentional, for it would merely be the prelude - the opening volley toward the altogether more dreadful machinations which the young death goddesses had in store for the meddlesome elders who had thus far attempted to set themselves up as the middlemen, the power brokers, between them and that most foul matron of nuclear devastation who was the real source of despotism within the organization and who they themselves had treatied with there in her very presence in the dungeons beneath the commandant's training center, where the shed blood of children flows like water and their incessant screams ever season the atmosphere of perpetual hell.

Within several days after her plot had been put into motion the titular head of the cult recruiters made her way to the administrative office to seek an audience only to be turned away by two masked internal security personnel who simply gestured for her to be on her way with the glistening black snouts of their silenced MP5 machine guns. As the cult recruiter gathered her robes about her and turned to go she could hear the unmistakeable sound of Bluebird and Britta laughing among themselves from behind the closed door. Noting this the cult recruiter left, proceeding down the corridors

and then to catch a transport to the experimental area proper where her contact waited. Her face belied nothing.

Inside the chamber Bluebird roared with mirth as Britta sat perched on the edge of the desk, legs dangling and swinging back and forth, relaying her recent pastimes at the construction area which had now simply become a free-for-all - a sickening pageant behind which Britta was the puppet master.

The power plays which were being made were enlivening in the extreme yet, as Bluebird laughed along with Britta as the younger described her recent forays in lurid detail, Bluebird could not help but turn over the potential consequences of their present course in her mind.

She felt that the members of their own personal units were inveterately loyal to a man, not only were recent actions undertaken by them on her behalf evidentiary of this fact, there was also the underlying dynamic that they had been programmed and engineered toward orientation and obedience to Bluebird and Britta respectively from the very onset.

After the yellow mists had finally settled upon the landscape and the attacks of the beginning of the campaign had been traded for internal repression and small-scale punitive raids, informed by dint of attrition and like their aforementioned counterpart also falling under the category of police action, the members of the death goddesses' personal units had shed their SCBA suits for the usual black of internal security, the shock troop, special intelligence, all of which were present

among the number of the sisters' fanatic loyalists.

A quantity of identifying insignias differentiating themselves from other organizational forces and marking them as operators under the white field and human starburst having yet to arrive from elsewhere and the tell-tale and alien-like protective suits used in the campaign now shelved, only brought out when operating in areas spectacularly contaminated, there was nothing overt to mark the members of these units apart from any other of their organizational counterparts. In time the number of organizational forces from the commander's headquarters and representative units from other areas would begin to steadily decrease. Some of the specialized units from both headquarters and a special intelligence squad from an area just outside the hidden borders of the engineering center had already departed. The intention was in short order for the area to be administered solely by the death goddesses' immediate force - self-contained and autonomous under the bilateral rule of the two sisters.

But what of the cult recruiters? They, unlike the war sectors and secret police sectors of the organization were not assigned to any one home base of operations. While the commandant's training center was the pulsing mind of control and beneath it the dungeons of the commandant herself - the cruel despot from which all manner of torment originates - as such the absolute center of the cult, their collective destiny was that of wanderers. Fell voices crying in the outer wilderness, travelers in regions so far beyond the borders of the

organization territories that what was seen in such places did not exist beyond soft whispers into the ears of the commandant herself. With this wandering spirit the commandant's cult recruiters could settle themselves anywhere - everywhere - staying for a length of time that only they knew and sometimes leaving without warning, often disappearing so suddenly and so covertly that it was as if they had never been present. Some of the places the cult recruiters traveled were devoid of all human inhabitants except themselves - entire regions of vast emptiness that had not been afforded any mercy when the twenty megaton nuclear devices had rained down like fire from on high.

Was the commandant's chapel that was being erected in the northwest corner of the experimental area to be a permanent presence of the high-tier witches in the region or was it meant to be a place that would be primarily a center of worship for the people of the experimental area with perhaps two or three cult recruiters present there on a regular basis, perhaps rotating out with other cult recruiters on a circuit basis?

Historically, Bluebird thought, it would be the latter. Yet there was no real historical precedence for either option in truth, for the phenomena of the commandant's chapels was an entirely new one - existent only since directly prior to the recent rallies back at the commander's headquarters. The rules of engagement had shifted considerably since the rally and all could tell that dread times were now afoot - not a returning to the ways of the past but a violent push further into a future ever-horrific under the ever-widening influence of the

commander and, always there in the background, the threat of the commandant. Bluebird had made the decision in her own mind that a line of demarcation existed between the commandant herself and the cult recruiters - a situation where the latter were not in fact in absolute monolithic lockstep with the former, much less a more organic esoteric expansion of the same as they were oft to promote, but rather a fractious politico-religious body with myriad agendas theirs and theirs alone. It was upon this premise that rested the ultimate success or failure of her own counter-machinations for if she was wrong in this instance it would be she who would be feeling the lash in the by and by - or perhaps sooner. Either possibility was, as the case may be, less than ideal.

Britta reached the end of the story - or at least the end of the story insofar as she was willing to tell Bluebird at the time - bouncing off her perch on the side of the desk with a deep guttural cackle and striding across the chamber, satisfied in her sexuality and satiated for a time, yet continually yearning for further fulfillment on that particular front which was intricately entwined with her increasing propensity for sadism.

Her older sister smiled and ceased her own pacing as she watched Britta. The young girl that she had first apprehended during that fateful meeting in the company of multiple minders from the cult recruiters those many months past had come into her own, rising out from nearly insurmountable deprivation in obscure outlying areas to wielding a command so encompassing in its

sovereignty and so liberal in the myriad usages that it could be vigorously applied that few within even the brass of the organization could dare fathom the details of its scope.

Her proclivities for sexual fulfillment and the sadistic angles thereof had been nurtured during their shared time at the commandant's training center yet had only been allowed to come to full flower in the days since they had arrived in the experimental area - an environment where there were no limits to the amoral evil with which little sister could ply her developing trade and bring to the forefront with all resources of the organization at her beck and call each and every latent lust, every imagined or half-imagined unfulfilled desire, utilizing the flesh of any and all who may take her passing fancy as her canvas, willing or unwilling - no matter.

On this night Britta dressed only in her sparse garment of black leather, enjoying the warmth from the small fire burning upon the iron-wrought stand in the corner of the chamber upon her exposed flesh. Bluebird leaned against the desk as she watched her little sister thusly attired - the pale countenance of the latter now ruddy by dint of the warmth, accentuating her freckles, shorn hair slowly beginning to grow in again though she would no doubt have it cut to the skull once more within several days' time in keeping with her present fashion. Bluebird fingered the nursery strap attached to the utility belt at her waist as she watched the little skinhead bend at the waist before the iron stand, allowing the flickering flames to lick dangerously near her face. She

smiled at Britta's reckless nature even in the most routine and mundane actions - the actions of one driven at the very core by an insane, sensate lust - her will driven by the flesh.

The taut curvatures of Britta's posterior inflamed within Bluebird her own lusts and near total recall of her time as a pontifex among the baby brigades back at the commandant's training center - remembering how she had by dint of directives from the cult recruiters stayed her own hand in the discipline of the younger - withholding the sort of intimate discipline that Bluebird felt Britta had been so in need of and which she herself was so eager to administer. Now that license which Bluebird had so long desired to engage - suspended under the authority of the cult recruiters - was hers to exercise and to the farthest limits of the same, for who would oppose her?

Bluebird had watched for the details, the intricacies to which Britta was involved with her former handlers in the cult and yet saw nothing to indicate that anything more existed than what Britta herself was willing to proffer - chaotic, girlish affections upon those she remembered from her past - affections which could just as easily turn to wrath in an instant according to the whims and fancies of one now beyond their power to effectively govern. If the cult recruiters were, as Bluebird was almost certain of, plotting against her reign, then having Britta as a component in their machinations who could be leveraged against Bluebird would be paramount. That said, Bluebird felt that Britta maintained her independence to a degree which could

even be considered extreme in nature. Perhaps the training she had undergone often under their very hands had been too effective in retrospect, she thought to herself with no small degree of amusement. While their relations had been cemented and initiated by the cult recruiters themselves - brought together in the brutal training areas above the dungeon-like domicile of the commandant herself - two demonesses acting as the poisonous tip of the organization's bayonet piercing ever further into the outlying territories - their liaison had been almost entirely political in nature. A unity meant to be observed as binding and unshakeable yet perhaps designed to be titular behind closed doors and in the actual corridors of power. Blood incest, Bluebird felt in her heart of hearts, would seal the contract between her and her younger sister in ways that political pageantry would not and even which their shared traumas in the commandant's training center and at the hands of the cult recruiters upon arrival at regional headquarters had not. Bluebird knew that the cult recruiters already had their hands well sullied in machinations meant to leverage and manipulate Britta toward their own purposes and, perhaps, the creation of obstacles to her own sovereignty, the outright provocations necessitating action on her part on an administrative level and requiring that much more psychological and mental involvement in the planning thereof - their own way of leveraging and manipulating Bluebird herself according to a psychological profile they knew well, for she was still in many ways their own creature. It was time to take the initiative now more than ever.

Bluebird again fingered the nursery strap hooked upon the utility belt at her waist - noticing that Britta's own and the implements it carried had been removed, laying upon the desk beside the stacks of death warrants and the small chalice containing a greenish elixir which kept Bluebird hyped-up, inducing speed through her mental processes and physicality as she went about the work of grinding down then building up in her own image the ruined landscape which she and her sister now administered. Putting the chalice to her lips and taking a long sip of the caustic tasting liquid, her fingers brushing against Britta's small disciplinary paddle laying on the table's surface, Bluebird began carefully and intentfully attaching the small metal claws to each of her slender fingertips - a disturbing smile beginning to cross over her face, distorting the angry scar that ran down her cheek.

Armed with her curiously delicate yet very cruel instruments of torment, Bluebird flexed her hands, watching with one eye as the reddish light from across the chamber glinted against the sharpened metallic points, her other eye fixated upon the supple flesh of Britta in the distance, still staring, seemingly absently so, into the flames, strange cooing noises emitting from her throat as she warmed herself in close proximity to the fire.

Bluebird pulled out the heavy wooden chair from behind her desk, its construction strong and sturdy, bereft of armrests, surfaces smooth and polished black with heavily lacquered paint. She sat the chair in the

direction facing across the room toward Britta and settled herself upon it, the sleek contours of the shining white vinyl in which her thirteen-year-old frame was sheathed contrasting dramatically with the darkness of the black furniture.

As she watched her sister in the distance, so young, so insane and so permeated with incessant lust, she began to feel a lust of her own build within her. Her sensations began to grow more acute as she found herself inadvertently drifting into a meditative state, her physicality seeming to writhe within the skintight suit - the feel of her own flesh against its unyielding solidity inflaming her, her face beginning to redden and grow hot. Two distinct lusts were building - one of a nature overtly sexual, another also visceral in its manifestation - but bloodthirsty in nature. In her mind the two began to meld together, entwining themselves one upon the other like the twin serpents of the herald's staff, her eyes narrowing as the mind control training taught to her in long trauma sessions in the commandant's training center activated automatically.

Britta turned then, her face suffused in the reddish glow of the flames, a smile beginning to play across her lips, her visage infernal. The eyes of the two sisters locked and Britta also activated her own burgeoning mental powers, envisioning the anomalous scene within her mind's eye that triggered the physiological shifting known to all high-tier graduates of the commandant's training center but wielded to a prodigious degree by her and Bluebird only among all others who had passed

through those subterranean iron gates. Britta slowly, intentfully and cat-like padded her way across the floor of the chamber towards Bluebird, bare feet silent upon the floor's surface, eyes brimming with mischief surveying the form of her sister seated before her.

Bluebird's hands rested upon her knees, flexing in premeditation as her sister approached, the sharp claws upon each fingertip extended outward. Their gazes locked as Britta moved closer and ever closer and the information which had been downloaded into their consciousness during their first ordeal in regional command before the hallucinatory vision of the commandant began to transmit itself one to the other telepathically, both of the sisters finding themselves involuntarily gritting their teeth as the visions of horrible destiny began to burst into their mind - plots within deadly plots, terror heaped upon terror and a realization of a coming change upon the landscape which neither of them had independently realized. The information secreted within them through the auspices of the ordeal were two parts of a cryptographic cipher - while seemingly salient alone, only revealing the fullness of the vision which the commandant had desired to transmit when put together into an integrated whole - the intelligence contained by the two sisters respectively acting as the mechanism by which the commandant's full plan was now unlocked, a coding mechanism held inside fleshly vessels.

Now presented before each other in physical proximity and mentally naked mind to mind - both of them reeling with the revelations that their telepathy had

unlocked - Britta slid herself onto the lap of Bluebird, straddling her, Britta's own naked thighs depressing upon Bluebird's own, sheathed in gleaming white. Bluebird felt Britta's hot breath steam upon her neck as the legs of her little sister's small frame wrapped around her waist, crushing against her physicality in sensual exultation - her prepubescent sex pleasuring itself in friction through its miniscule leather covering rubbing against the wasp-thin waist of the older - a slight hiss emitting from the mouth of the younger.

There was no need for words as Bluebird lifted her left hand in a gesture of invitation, a dread come-hither motion yet suffused with threat, before she grasped the tip of the razor-sharp, cat-like claw upon her middle finger deftly in her mouth, turning her head slightly and allowing it to drop upon the outstretched palm of her opposite hand, then carefully secreting it in a small nylon pouch upon her utility belt set about her middle, the nursery strap near it dangling downward within an inch to the floor beneath.

Bluebird lifted the finger to her sisters mouth, softly depressing the thin lips of the younger, watching with pleasure as Britta's eyes rolled back into her head in carnal reaction to her slightest touch. Removing it from the lips now parted, harsh breath exuding out from the mouth beyond, Bluebird raised the hand to her own mouth, claw-tipped fingers carefully curved downward to palm yet, knowing the ecstasy to come, some tips thereof still managing to pierce the alabaster white flesh thereof - small pinpoints of life's red elixir forming thereupon. Bluebird inserted the full length of her

longest finger so extended into the wetness of her maw, moistening and caressing with tactile tongue the slender digit before removing it, snaking downward along her little sister's side, then below the thin strip of leather encircling her waist, parting the thong betwixt her springy buttocks and caressing it inward then inserting it fully inch by inch into that path of Sodom which grasped it tightly, eagerly, blasphemously.

As Bluebird began to thrust her finger further into her little sister's rectum then withdrawing slightly before inserting again, fucking, Britta reciprocated by bucking against her sister's penetration with great enthusiasm, groans of pleasure escaping from her throat as Bluebird spread her other fingers outward, cool fingers upon hot flesh cradling the younger girl - metal-tipped nails ever so gently scraping upon pliant curves. Bluebird reached her other hand around behind Britta, squeezing an exposed cheek firmly, clawed nails digging in ever so slightly, pulsing with the rhythm of her penetrations. Bluebird could feel the smooth contours of Britta' face against her neck, her head buried upon the older sister's shoulder - eyes most likely closed in reaction to Bluebird's carefully orchestrated physical ministrations, so long desired by her but so long in the coming. Bluebird herself stared outward, past Britta and her head covered with almost-soft hair, shave neglected by purpose or absence and distractedness of mind, toward the censer of flame on the far side of the chamber.

As the flames crackled, wood set aflame by refuse, Bluebird imagined the scenes from their shared

inaugural foray into the experimental area - the day of great subduing. The mangled bodies ripped to pieces flung into the air by the explosions of the chemical warheads, the tactile crunch of the bodies of man, woman and child under the rolling tread of her personal carrier - heads crushing beneath its tonnage - blood, brains and bone matter spraying outward and upward, adorning the black steel of the vehicle in grisly relief.

Bluebird nuzzled against her sister's head, extending a wet tongue to caress an ear, prompting Britta to raise her face - eyes locked once again. The mental lock stayed with them though the telepathic transmission of shared destiny to come was now complete - but within each other's eyes they saw further visions - of what had come to pass and what would come to pass. Britta saw the images of her sister from the day of wrath - tall sinewy body bearing only the slightest signs of womanhood sheathed within an immaculate white now stained with splatters of blood - yellow poisonous mists rising around her, eyes concealed behind platinum mirror reflecting exploding ordnance and life-draining chemical smoke. Harsh orders spoken in amplified, robotic cadence issuing forth from helmeted head - urging, cajoling, directing her troops toward further and ever-horrific acts of genocidal abandon.

As Bluebird stared into the eyes of her younger sister - lids usually wide awake with mania now somewhat parted as a result of physical reaction to penetration - she could see within the reflected retinas scenes of the little one's equally horrific acts. Demon-faced and seemingly near-naked girl, criss-crossed with black leather straps

yet translucent covering upon abdomen, chest and limbs reflecting shimmering destructive fire leaping, blood-covered, upon near-dead bodies - dispatching them cruelly with small razor-sharp and curved blade tracing sigils of apocalyptic chaos, lens of vision upon black demoness visage above tusks seeming to shine with darkened purple light drinking in the shed lifeforce of each and every of the dead and dying upon which she gave her own very special ministrations. As the lacerations revealed first rivulets of blood, then the sickening trickling bile of subcutaneous fat and finally bone and the organs beneath the creature - monstrous in lethal intent as she was small in stature - would use those sharpened, thrusting tusks to gore the exposed flesh - anointing them in black devotion - sometimes trailing strings of intestines as she marched onward to another victim, then another and another.

Though these scenes were wreathed in portent and contained within them the signs of their shared transformation - a transformation which neither of them would have readily premeditated even during the harshest and most cruel ordeals which they had suffered, sometimes singly, sometimes together, there past in the commandant's training center - the secret of their destiny to come was even more ominous. For they knew now, in that moment, that they together were to be the omen of a future altogether black - in their coming skies turned to shrouds of churning darkness, concourse of the winds reversing in unnatural disturbance - moon turning to blood under which all future life under the heel of their regime was to become an abomination that would shake

life and nature to the very foundations of the earth.

In this realization they pressed their mouths together - open, wet and yearning for exploration - tongues tasting and entwining within the reddish secret recesses of each other. Sisterly love, carnal yet beyond carnal - an incest. Though they had not been born of the same father and mother, yet their bonds through shared trauma, torture and bloodshed wrought by their very hands creating a bond stronger than any of the tentative familial reactionary bonds so beloved, so protected in the past. All of that past was now gone, wiped away in the insane flash of nuclear nightmare. Now the canvas, even seventy-years after, was for the most part blank - and it was upon this canvas of flesh and land tempered by abject destruction which they would write their own story in characters written by arcing lightning.

Bluebird withdrew her finger from Britta's posterior and wrenched her face away from Britta's wet kisses in order to remove yet another metal claw upon the ring finger, clasping it in her teeth while her other hand still caressed the young one's buttocks, kneading the flesh - the points of her claws causing pinpricks of blood. Lust, vision and reddening blood all rising within her in an unholy triumvirate Bluebird spit the claw removed from her second finger from her mouth, causing a slight cut upon her lower lip, the slightest sign of her life force dripping downward upon her chin - the metallic claw clattering across the floor of the chamber. Pressing this finger upon the middle of the same hand, the rest curled into careful fist, Bluebird moistened them in tangent, tasting the earthy stench of her sister's entrails as she

stared into Britta's now sweaty face - salty streams of exertion crossing in slow downward fashion against angry red freckles upon little girl cheeks.

Lubricated and primed Bluebird slid the clawed curled fingers once more down her sister's flesh, once again parting the thong between the young girl's heated buttocks and inserting the longest finger slowly, intentfully, watching as her sister bit her lip in sensual reaction then watching as the young one's eyes rolled back into their sockets and then listening as her mouth elicited a harsh animalistic gasp as Bluebird massaged the second finger in expanding the fleshly opening. Once accepted, eagerly so, Bluebird recommenced the fucking in earnest - dual fingers inserting and withdrawing again and again, the sounds of flesh slapping upon flesh intermingling with Britta's increasing snarls as she bucked against the remaining outstretched fingers cradling her.

Bluebird slowed the pace intentionally, allowing her fingers to press deeper and deeper into Britta's insides, heedless as the small metallic claws dug into the flesh of her young sister's backside, the feel of small rivulets of blood dripping downward over her hand and staining the floor at the foot of the chair. Bluebird nuzzled Britta's head so that the younger tilted her own head backward, exposing the soft contours of her neck and shoulders. She laughed in her own way now, cold in inflection yet no less malicious than Britta's own as she raised her right hand - a claw upon every finger now outstretched - carefully raking one of them across the exposed flesh at the base of Britta's neck - blood now flowing, then her

own lips instinctively depressing upon the wound, drinking in the warm red elixir as would a bird of prey.

In the distant citadels of the commander's headquarters high atop a tower most secure, wreathed in shining razor-wire glimmering under the glow of an inauspicious moon, an eye opened - probing outward - the eye of the commander himself, feeling a shift - an omen of coming darkness.

In the most depraved and black dungeons far beneath the keep the commandant eyed through black mesh visor the scene even as it unfolded, the moving images of the two sisters - her chosen - suspended in miniature within the recesses of a glass orb set upon a plinth which was wreathed by a ghostly, reddish and blood-like mist that circulated around it slowly and nauseatingly in pace as the gloved hands of the commandant clapped in time, slowly, perversely, with each of Bluebird's thrusts, her demoness's body surrounded by the insane and tortured screams of thousands of captive children.

There, in the chamber of regional command within whose very hand and signature so many deaths were now committed for coming execution, summary and extraordinary, Bluebird withdrew her mouth from Britta's wound - lips now stained with the blood of her sister and her own blood, the prick upon the lip which she had caused while removing one of her metallic claws to better effect the sodomy of her younger counterpart. Shared blood now intermingling upon her lips, Bluebird brought Britta's face to her own, clasping tightly upon the back of shorn head and bringing their lips together,

depressing against each other, blood of the two churning within the passionate, sisterly kiss, a kiss which would bind the two together - Bluebird knew well - in a devil's pact - the likes of which even the most adept witch among the cult recruiters was never, now, to tear asunder.

CHAPTER 18

Sweat dripped from Astrid's brow as she raised the leather strap again and again, her muscled arms controlling the weight of the heavy harness leather with brutal precision as the glistening black strap swung upward and behind her head before crashing down on the quivering flesh of the eleven-year-old acolyte restrained to the wooden cross-beam beneath her. With a final resounding crack of leather upon naked flesh the acolyte's punishment was over - two other acolytes more senior in age and station unbuckling the restraints at Astrid's emphatic gesture and allowing the still sobbing young girl to crumple to the floor. Another young acolyte approached and, taking the leather strap from Astrid's outstretched hands, moved silently, her face and expression hidden behind black cowl, toward the far end of the large hall where the instrument would be polished and conditioned - made supple before the next correctional cycle began less than one hour hence.

Her labors finished for the time being, Astrid moved across the room as well but in the opposite direction from where the acolyte was headed - toward a small wooden table upon which sat a carafe of cold water and some small gristly blocks of food, crude proteins made from rendered bodies and, like most food consumed by

organizational personnel, amply laced with narcotics designed to enhance the performance and occupational acumen of those so consuming in furtherance of the commander's mission. Unlike the acolyte, Astrid's own cowl was thrown back, her face haughty despite the many hours she had put in thus far, her piercing eyes taking in the myriad sights of torture that spread out in horrific relief throughout the hall.

The sounds of weeping permeated the atmosphere and in the closed-off corridors beyond where the cells were located Astrid could hear the faint echoes of bloodcurdling screams, most disturbing in nature, where those who had run severely afoul of the cult authority received the attentions of the most dreadful disciplinarians the cult had produced. Astrid had to keep herself from allowing a sadistic grin to cross her face as she walked and considered, for she knew very well what took place in the cells, her body thrilling with the thought. Still, she considered, her present assignment was most appropriate to her constitution and a very useful one as she awaited the more clandestine role which would soon be hers and which would take her away from the area surrounding the commander's headquarters and into an environment altogether new.

As she settled herself down on the chair by the small table she could readily apprehend the predominant olfactory presence throughout the chamber - the smell of tears - unmistakeable and deeply satisfying to someone such as Astrid's particular skills and proclivities. Wet, salty, penitent.

A razor drawn forth from within her robes cut a cube

of the speed-laced protein, once and then twice, quartering the substance then delicately lifted to thin mouth, swallowed without chewing then washed down with a generous draught of cold water straight from the carafe. The needful hydration of the water suffused her first, replenishing the liquids of her body shed in grim exertion as she had gone about her fell tasks vigorously and unmercifully. The effects of the narcotic hit her several seconds after causing the sweat to turn suddenly cold upon her brow, a freezing sensation rushing through her veins, heart-rate increasing and pulse hammering. Astrid's eyes narrowed involuntarily by dint of the stimulant as she stared forward surveying her hall of torment - Chazona's blessing.

Some of the girls were now being led out, such as the young one who had experienced the biting taste of Astrid's lash only a few minutes prior. These, still naked, flesh covered with reddened weals, some black-and-blue, some bearing blood-dripping lacerations inflicted by whippy canes of metal and wood - some lacerations resulting from instruments and uncanny methods much more dread in both consequence and delivery. A few of the young girls, also naked, remained strapped immobile to whatever apparatus of punishment upon which they were already restrained - having suffered through one disciplinary cycle already and left to suffer through another soon commencing - recipients of a double-portion of pain - another layer of punitive wrath pushing them to the limits of physical and psychological endurance.

As some remained and some departed, another fresh

batch was brought in, already having been disrobed in an adjoining antechamber. Many of them already tearful, bodies rebelling against their orders in terrified premonition of what was to come, found their steps slowing as they were led into the hall, eyes darting to and fro and consciousness that of prey suddenly finding themselves caught irrevocably in the hunter's snare. The hesitant ones were driven forth gleefully by acolytes their senior, long black-braided dressage whips held aloft threateningly. These more affected parties Astrid eyed closely as she sat, harsh speed drilling through her, the fear emanating off of them in waves making contemplation of their coming punishment all the more delectable in its consideration.

All of these acolytes to a one would soon be initiated as full-fledged cult recruiters in a mass initiation ceremony to come, comprising not only initiations for the demographic here under her direct tutelage but also for many trainees from abroad, traveling with their minders from far afield to the commander's headquarters for the coming rally.

While the latter acolytes after initiation were destined for a myriad of possible assignments - some for the commander's training center, some to be sent as missionaries far into the outlying wilderness - a singular and special assignment was reserved for the acolytes now in the chapel hall post-ceremony. These select - the objects of the harshest ordeals administered under the hands of Astrid herself and her direct assistants - would accompany Astrid to what was to become the experimental area, to be domiciled in the regional

headquarters and in other cult recruiter installations that would be sprouting up after the takeover. The purpose of their ordeals now was twofold in nature. Firstly to engender the highest possible level of internal counterintelligence fortitude - to wit, resistance to interrogation both physically and psychologically. Their endurance on both fronts was now being amply tested and taken to the very limits, a safeguard and a further level of redundancy in that they were likely to not - in internal analysis thus far, reports supplied by liaisons in special intelligence - be subject to anything more extreme than what was already befalling them. Should they be able to withstand the severe, brutal and incessantly punitive and highly sophisticated measures here then they should certainly be able to withstand anything that they might experience in future - should circumstances come to the worse - at the hand of hostile parties - external or internal to the cultists. The second purpose was to develop in them a taste for the cruelty of their regime within a regime - for, once experienced on the receiving end - the level of brutality that they themselves would be able to execute, once given license to do so, was trebled.

As the narcotics took hold within Astrid she found herself scanning the torture floor of the hall eagerly, foaming spittle dribbling from her mouth - so many hellish delights to which her still wayward daughters had been and would be subjected to. The freshest girls however, those most fearful - yet untouched - were the objects of her single-minded desire as she watched them

being driven forth by the long whips of her already partially developed and highly sadistic entourage. Her eyes narrowed even more as her pupils dilated under the effects of the drugs - the well-worked muscles of her back and triceps suffused with new life, new sustenance, by dint of the speed and the human protein recently consumed. Which of these fresh daughters would be first subjected to her wrath, her programming, her desire? Despite Astrid's intention to retain some semblance of composure she found herself laughing, maniacally so, and though her body shook with mirth within her robes, all that escaped her mouth was a raspy hiss - subdued in volume but still enough to attract the attention of both penitents and administrative young sisters-to-be who acted as the facilitators and sometimes as the very extension of her own punitive will - for the latter knew that their disciplinary ministrations reflected that of their command and if their own executionary discipline was not up to par it was Astrid herself whom they would have to answer to.

None of the apparatus which spread across the hall was arbitrary in nature - each device, each implement, each environment in miniature being decided upon well in advance, thoughtfully, meticulously, by senior sisters within the cult recruiters and with the expert input of both special intelligence, internal security and the width and breadth of the most secure sectors of the organization. These were the mechanisms built to develop and instill applied terror - for those who so graduating under pressed and punished flesh would be those instilling and applying even greater terror -

organized and fearfully despotic - upon similarly fresh flesh in the outer areas - the regions towards which the sharp-fingered hand the commandant grasped, ever closer, in a psychotic will to dominate, possess, transfigure. And - when such transfiguration had come to full flower - what horror then would sprout violently from the shattered, poisoned earth? Astrid laughed in horrific future speculation - this time audibly causing her minions and still green trainees, both equally captive, to shudder.

Time passed forward into time in fluid measure under the effects of the drugs and before Astrid herself knew the moment for further punishment had arrived, the commencement of yet another correctional cycle - each future sister to be receiving and future sister minders to be administrating situated at their respective stations one and all, prepared and at the ready for the sound of the large brass gong and, upon thrice sounded, brutal and harsh discipline to commence. From the area nearest to the entrance to the cells across the hall two small acolytes, extremely young and as such exceedingly short in stature, features hidden completely beneath black robes and hoods, the length of their robes reaching down to the ground itself, giving the impression that they were gliding across the floor, positioned themselves before the golden circular instrument, kneeling down and then extending themselves again with stout wooden staves in hand, the ends bound with a sphere of leather made from taut human skin.

Astrid sat rigid as she awaited her signal - fists bound together so tight that blood dripped from the

small fissures within balled hands - then releasing to shove the last few gelatinous crumbs of narcotic speed-laced corpse product between trembling red lips. The chapel hall stretched before her now even more vast in apprehension, each acolyte to be tortured again and each one virginal to such pain awaiting the very new and unique horrific ministrations of her and her minions, all naked and shaking in fear, each a pulsating human link in a chain of terror that would extend in time to the very fructification of her soon coming destiny, deadly and clandestine.

Once the sound of the gong... then twice... then thrice. Even as the last reverberation of the instrument began to fade through the dread hall it was replaced with another sound altogether - the sounds of dozens upon dozens of screams intermingling one unto the other, the sounds of leather straps, canes of diverse design, wooden paddles along with satanic whips of myriad fashion and flesh itself as the instrument of torment punished naked flesh. Tandem to this the sudden sound of devilish machinery starting in sputters, generators igniting, the primitive cranks of mechanical devices of torture - then the wailing beginning as these instruments so designed went about their horrible tasks.

Astrid sprang from her seat, her mouth curled into a horrific smile, and screamed - her own sound of predatory rapture enhanced by dint of the trauma-induced brainwashing and sundry training she had undergone for countless years in the dungeons of the commandant creating a deep, trilling and visceral sound that penetrated even the din of the mass torture now

taking place. Her shrieking heard and duly apprehended by the organizational personnel her junior, the mass torture did not pause in the timbre of its discipline but rather increased.

Walking with a clipped and elite gait she approached the first station - a young girl of nine was bent over obscenely in such a fashion facilitating maximum exposure - naked flesh grasping a padded black leatherette piece of furniture, once the property of one of the wardens who had administered over the federal prison which now acted as the commander's headquarters, brought from there, nearby, to the newly erected commandant's chapel.

The acolyte wept involuntarily, face reddening in shame and hate, even as she wrenched her visage back toward Astrid and the sister engaged in administering the punishment and snarled vocally in protest, whitest teeth shining amid reddish mouth, thick tied pigtails of blonde hair thrashing against pale white shoulders. Astrid's smile widened as she saw the acolyte's rebellion, her mind in its speed-induced racing glancing quickly from the parted lips of the young girl in her foul grimace to the still dripping wet syringe upon the small table beside then back again.

She recognized the drug and the effect immediately - the DELTA cycle, the killing programming.

Astrid watched closely as the stout black delrin cane slammed down once again with a resounding crack upon the already bleeding backside of the young blonde acolyte, her snarls and thrashings not that of the bound penitent but instead more resembling those of a feral

animal, violent and wild.

In the corner of the small partially partitioned area amidst the large hall a high-tier cult recruiter stood, her cowl thrown back revealing shaved head, freshly shorn and still bearing the tell-tale signs of blood, and thin, cruel features. From her hand hung a diadem upon a black nylon cord, which sparkled with light ever so slightly under the radiant glare of the lights above.

Though bound by no physical bonds, the child receiving the strokes, quickly transitioning from bruising to purple to black to bloody upon fleshly canvas, retained her position so ordered and so assumed in the preparations of the ordeal - despite the fact that her mind reeled in abject psychosis, the violence of which was readily evident by her fierce protestations vocalized and well apparent in facial gesture.

Thus the sinister mechanism of the applied programming, for, should the cult recruiter handler present drop the diadem either by will or by chance, the spellbound would be spellbound no more, and, with the effects of the narcotic having been sent into the bloodstream via the auspices of the syringe, in tangent with the trauma-induced imprinting already effected within the passing of seemingly sparse minutes, the beast writhing for release within the young girl would be on the loose, the mind-control induced physical paralysis broken - muscles and brain engorged with the need to kill, massacre and to do so with reckless abandon.

Astrid approached the young girl, watching as the newly inflicted angry red weals upon her tender

posterior went from red to black while the rising anger evident in her demeanor and the thrashings of her head increased into rage and then psychosis. A ticking time bomb which could be activated, its most lethal potential realized and instantly so by a mere gesture.

The witch in the corner holding the amulet which dangled from skeletal hands stood stock still, face blank, only the slightest twinkle in the eye belying the extremely high-tier level of training from which she was most certainly a seasoned graduate. Astrid glanced back and forth between the acting hypnotist and the acolyte in a frenzy of thought and apprehension. Her lips glistened, her mind suffused with lust and lust for power. She could deduce that the witch holding the diadem was not only the product of the most secret, internal schools within the sisterhood but perhaps herself possessed of a rank stratospheric yet unknowable in level. Did she play the role of a reigning deity herself in some black project in the wilderness far from organizational borders, the spearhead of some dreadful experiment in social engineering and territorial control? Was she a direct associate of the commandant herself, working in personal tandem on a daily basis with that death goddess most predominant - there in the dungeons beneath the commandant's training center - an administrator of grisly processes undertaken under the watchful eye of the commandant herself? Astrid could only speculate, yet the presence of the seasoned witch there in the hall during the correctional cycle thrilled her, for it was yet a further indicator of the premium set on the unfolding project and her role within the same.

Astrid raised her hand in command for the punishment to cease - at least for a time. The acolyte wielding the cane stepped back, holding the instrument at her side in a manner not at all dissimilar to the position with which a dress saber would be held in ceremonial military processions in the years before the wars. The shorn-headed witch in the corner administering the brainwashing did not move - still dangling the diadem upon the thread, a signal of the ever-present programming - the cessation of which even amidst sisters as seasoned as herself and Astrid might very well prove disastrous.

The nine-year-old acolyte's buttocks were now thoroughly ruined in appearance, criss-crossing spiderwebs of blood slashed with the thick black and red weals of the most recent strikes. Astrid approached the little girl exuding a perverse, seemingly loving demeanor even through the psychological wall of the speed thrumming through her body - the interested mother, the curious aunt, the compassionate yet stern sister well senior - yet none of the above. The fabric of Astrid's robe stroked against the girl's wounds in the closeness of their proximity - the acolyte's snarls turned to panting, grasping for breath, ribcage expanding then retracting, eyes turned so far back into her head via the ever-gripping killer programming of the chemical injection that only the whites now showed beneath fluttering lids.

Astrid patted the acolyte's buttocks companionably, raising her hand to her mouth and licking the smears of blood from her palm - sweet, intense, yet laced with the promise of terror. Seeing Astrid beginning to bend down

to now situate her own face near that of the face of the girl the punisher's eyes lighted with warning, afraid that the acolyte might harm her involuntarily. Astrid glanced back further at the shaven-headed witch yet noticed no reaction, except perhaps a small smirk dancing at the corner of her lips. Both of these signals pleased Astrid, as she placed her own lips near to the acolytes ear, whispering words between them and them alone before raising herself up once more as she considered the girl beneath her - the first of her young assassins.

CHAPTER 19

Britta moved lithely across the room, every step of her bare feet on the concrete curling the muscles of her legs upward enticingly and causing a sway of one buttock then another, the plump, firm mounds of flesh bifurcated by a shining leather thong which disappeared at her path of sodom.

She was operating now, spying on behalf of her older sister under the guise of slaking her own lusts, which were large.

She could apprehend the abject desire of the twenty-some-odd year-old cult recruiter that eyed her now, the intensity of her blue eyes maniacally dancing over Britta's curves, pert, trauma-scarred bottom, small puffed nipples upon pale flat chest criss-crossed with thin leather straps.

Britta reached one hand down and then another, kneading the flesh of her rear while arching her back, throwing her exposed shoulder blades back and allowing a guttural purr to escape her lips.

The cult recruiter to whom she had been assigned responded with her own sound of lust most sincere, tongue curling over lips and floods of hormones suffusing her as she watched the little death goddess about her promenade.

Britta's own eyes, also most sincerely, yet betraying nothing of her great deception, sparkled in apprehension of the emotional and physical desire of the sister - a coy come-hither glance from the child all that was needed to cause the cult recruiter to draw close.

As the cult recruiter edged nearer, tentatively still, trembling fingers outstretched to clasp an area of near-naked flesh, Britta slipped the small polished spike from the edge of her garment and, palming its flat base, raised it suddenly upward with a scream and lodged it, quivering and bloody, within the throat of the cult recruiter.

The witch gasped, one hand whipping toward her wound, eyes wide and face aghast as she felt her life's breath escaping her. Britta smiled, meeting her victim's gaze only once more before turning, proceeding on to more engaging pastimes, her work finished for now.

As the cult recruiter slowly fell into death, her gaze passed from the departing figure of Britta, that body and character which she had so wanted, to the small black lockbox sitting upon the mantle of her cell.

Even the very existence of the box was an indictment - a damnation - and within the hour before her body had even begun to turn cold, she knew, those men without masks, but intelligence nonetheless, smirks upon their faces and ordered bodies within the unmarked uniforms of Bluebird's retinue, would be clearing the witch's cells - and then their world would be turned upside down.

CHAPTER 20

"What a succulent little morsel you are, child!"

The proctor wet his lips with an amphetamine-based liquid, smacking them together briefly then running his tongue over them lasciviously as he eyed the little girl that stood naked before him in the white examining room, bright winter sunlight flooding through the scum-caked window highlighting every curvature of pale flesh and downy white hair upon the naked form.

He motioned to her and she walked toward him obediently, a firm hand upon a small shoulder guiding her over his lap, her own hands now planted on the surface of the floor, fingers splayed. The proctor glided his hand over each individual curvature of the girl's exposed buttocks, the two fleshy, springy mounds separated and stretched in the now exposing position revealing a small, puckering rectum, only slightly dark and - further on - the silky smoothness of her prepubescent sex.

The proctor ran his fingers lightly and only perfunctorily so over these orifices which he could have enjoyed to the hilt, should he had been so inclined.

He preferred boys of his own age sexually - a uranian through and through - but a female here and there was good for the sake of his experiments, in furtherance of the black sciences, and he admired, even appreciated, being able to compare both sexes of various ages and psycho-physical constitutions in order to test their respective resilience within the confines of his laboratory setting.

Frowning slightly, seeing what appeared to be at first glance to be a blemish, the proctor ran his long fingers down to the girls thighs - parting the legs then pulling at the flesh of the offending limb and then gasping in delight at what he saw. A small tattoo of a black widow spider, the maker's mark of the engineer, signifying that his young patient was one of the engineering center humans bred by the engineer himself especially for experimentation - in addition to the odd job in the workshop.

The proctor looked up and raised his eyebrow knowingly - to which gesture the male nurse assistant against the wall near the window approached, medical tray in hand upon which sat various instruments. The nurse held the platter carefully before the proctor, as the instruments and open glass containers set upon it were sensitive in the extreme, and the penalties for anything less than exactitude in his service to the proctor would have been, as the case may be, most severe.

The proctor dipped his hands into one familiar jar of chemicals once again, wetting his lips further and chuckling as he did so, glancing into the eyes of the nurse while pinching the black widow tattoo of the girl

situated upon his lap painfully betwixt youthful thighs and noticing, not unexpectedly, that not the slightest sound of protest emanated from her as he did so. The nurse on the other hand visibly twitched both at the gesture and the look, yet held the instrument-bearing platter without shaking. Still, not good enough.

"Oh, bring the table over here and set our materials on it, you dolt!" sneered the proctor - endangering by his displeasure and the nervous constitution of the nurse the possibility of terminal error he did not wish to see on this of all days. He licked his lips reactively, letting the amphetamine liquid drift into his mouth and then sublingually situating it for optimal absorption beneath his ever so active tongue. The effects of the double dosage of the drugs now steeling him at long last, he watched with a single bead of sweat dripping down his brow as the nurse lowered the tray to the ground, fetching a small table from elsewhere in the examining room and then placing it within easy reach of his employer. He made a mental note to himself to make a personnel change posthaste the next time he had a chance encounter with a member of the administrative offices.

Reaching toward the tray the proctor fished into a second jar of liquid with his long fingers, removing a small black cylinder-shaped object, a thick black plastic casing drilled with multiple holes along its surface and holding a sponge-like substance within which was now thoroughly soaked with the liquid chemical compounds which it had been floating in for several hours.

"This is the primer only - but very important

nonetheless - the chemical dosage liberal and entirely necessary for a successful outcome according to our prior tests - facilitating a numbness of the body and, to a degree, an imperviousness to pain which will allow for the more pointy end of the experiment to be facilitated without any possibility for error."

The proctor giggled to himself at his own pun, before staring at the nurse, making sure that he was dutifully transcribing his words into the log. Seeing the nurse furiously scribbling record into the ratty notebook previously held in the pocket of his equally tattered lab coat and, somewhat satisfied, the proctor continued.

"The primer will be administered in such a fashion as to allow for the most thorough assimilation of the chemical into the bloodstream - containing a core active compound synthesized by the engineer himself, along with a proprietary blend of my own design. This method of administering has, thus far, proved much more effective than oral administration and, as such, has become the gold standard if you will in this stage of the process."

Parting the girls buttocks carefully with one hand, with the other he inserted the suppository into her anus, once nearly fully in placing an extended finger into the opening at the bottom of the bullet-shaped device, depressing the sponge-like material within creating an excretion of the chemical blend as the object moved fully in, then completely enveloped itself within the patient's entrails.

"The only sound from the patient was a slight inhalation of breath upon initial insertion, indicating

once again the superiority in pliability of those bearing the sign of the black widow."

The proctor felt the girl go taut against him, her thighs crossed against his own growing rigid, then relaxing, yet still tense. He spread her cheeks again, gazing intently but then softening in countenance as he satisfied himself that the insert was not in danger of involuntary expectorating.

Reaching toward his surgical tray he cleared his throat, his esophagus suddenly constricted by dint of the amphetamines dripping downward, burning his internal flesh. His mouth curled into a sardonic leer. Burning, yet not burning near as bright as the stimulant which was now flaring within the entrails of his young patient.

A small vial in one hand and a very large needle in the other, the proctor went about the business of filling the latter, while holding forth both for the benefit of his soon to be erstwhile nurse assistant and more importantly for the internal files of the engineering center and his own office.

"Within my hand I now hold a .22 gauge syringe which shall be, upon preparations completed filling its ancillary container with the proper and decided upon dosage, inserted into the back of the neck of our patient. This stage of the process is the ignition switch, if you will, of the stellate anglion activator - the chemicals upon depressing which will reach the ball of nerves situated at the bottom of the neck and top of the spinal column, their influx which will facilitate immediate and unnatural growth of the nerve extensions, creating sudden stress prompts in the subject."

As the nurse continued transcribing his report, the proctor wrenched his right calf around the legs of the girl, pinioning her further across his knees and then grabbed a handful of her hair in further restraint and clearance of the target area before stabbing the medical needle deep into her neck, depressing the syringe with a grunt as he watched a sudden rash of red marks emerge upon the skin in a one quarter-inch circle around the place of injection.

One eye of the girl began fluttering uncontrollably, signifying that the narcotic had met the sweet spot and, upon feeling the thrumming on the left side of her body, the proctor slammed the needle, now withdrawn, onto the tray, reaching several fingers and dipping them into the glass container of liquid amphetamines upon the same once again, hastily rubbing the liquid against his lips then slurping the remaining moisture from his fingers in a perverse suckling.

He motioned to the nurse with a nod of his head and his assistant, setting aside his notebook, brought forth a small wooden paddle, easily wieldable - thick in width, stain slightly dark, yet fresh, drilled with half-inch holes along the Spencer disciplinary model, beveled on one side and flat upon the other.

The proctor began spanking the little girl upon his lap in firm, hard smacks, his right leg still pinioning her own, his free hand depressing against her upper back in premeditation of the struggling which would soon ensue. With each smack the flesh of the patient's buttocks reddened more than appreciably, unnaturally so, the blood internally swelling to the surface in bright red

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patches commensurate to the application of the paddle yet enhanced and accelerated far beyond what would be considered normative. Into the thirteenth or fourteenth application a disturbing sigh began to emanate from the little girl's mouth and her legs began to kick abjectly, akin to the effects of a seizure.

Dribblings of white foam began to curl down the girl's mouth and chin and the proctor began to feel that her skin was now hot to the very touch, beyond fever in temperature.

Eyebrows arching dramatically the proctor reared the wooden paddle far behind his head and then began raining down in earnest with insanely cruel, unmerciful strikes, over and over, causing pinprick bloody contusions to appear upon the surface of her skin, the girl now bucking wildly, so much so that the proctor's hold on her, limb against dual limbs, was becoming compromised.

"Bring the goggles!" the proctor snarled to his nurse, now heedless of protocol as the little girl struggled about furiously upon his lap as he continued the punishment cycle of the process, building physical and psychological fear upon reigning fear, the slaps of the flat wood now audibly infused with the extra resonance of the blood beginning to flow upon the surface of the implement as it smacked down in extra adherence to naked flesh in resounding report, flecks of blood flying upward from the exposed flesh of the child then dissipating within the glow of the incoming morning sun.

"The lifeforce, and at its fullest,..." the proctor hissed, watching the blood waft and intermingle with the dust

floating in the air, sliding the blood-stained paddle onto the surgical tray at his side, pulling the black goggles over his eyes as his nurse did also.

A little over four feet tall, body now burning itself slowly from the inside whilst on the exterior youthful legs kicked, bucking past her handler, blood sluicing down her thighs and lubricating the sickening flow of limbs scissoring in bodily protestation, wetting and smearing the crude mark of the black widow spider upon her inner thigh in crimson, the patient stared into the white radiant abyss that suddenly opened before her.

All that the patient saw as the nurse slid back the corrugated metal door facing her were the arcs of burning white hot phosphorous within, careening chaotically off the concrete walls - her white radiant abyss, her escape - her path of flight, now open. She jumped suddenly from the lap of the proctor, her bloodied legs in brutal response of the full stellate anglion activation now in place easily overpowering his now only cosmetic ministrations at restraint. She ran, frantically, leaving bloody footprints across the floor, fleeing into the lethal white light. As soon as she had entered the nurse slammed the door sidewards and shut once again, clamping it secure with a white metal locking mechanism and then throwing open the observation window, protected with high-test industrial clear glass, to which he and the proctor gathered, goggles still intact, and watched carefully as their experiment reached its terminal conclusion.

The burning phosphorous had been dropped from portholes atop the chamber, which was built inside an

old shipping container that had been moved beside the internal office space within the engineering center, the door modified, cut and put into place, the interior fortified with concrete slabs. The proctor had enacted the experiment several times now since the chamber had been installed and the ordnance had been available to him, alternating with various techniques in times prior but now finding the current method to be the most satisfying and yielding the most viable laboratory evidence.

As the proctor began to drone audibly in aftermath, his gleeful mood barely masked by his pretense of being scholarly, recounting the last stages of the punishment cycle for the record and describing the bodily effects that were likely taking place within the young girl's physicality internally by dint of the dosing as well as externally by the application of the phosphorous, the nurse struggled to keep his eyes upon the pages of his notebook as he wrote, his notations becoming indecipherable scrawls as he stared through his goggles and into the glass window of the chamber, watching as the blood dripping down the girl's limbs began to sizzle and then boil. With each filament of the burning allotrope that set down upon the flesh of the patient the skin began to flare, burning quickly into fat and flesh and then bone. As the black widow programmed engineering center produced human slowly fell to the floor, bowing down like falling ash, the proctor turned his head from the window in disgust as the smokescreen created by the burning incendiary concealed further vision of the figure within.

"Highly inconclusive, highly inclusive!" he exclaimed to the nurse, shaking his head emphatically. "The ventilation is still subpar, as is the observable peregrinations of the internal processes taking place once the patient has fled. Another, we must have another - and on the double!" The proctor's body shook violently, rapt in mania, and the nurse ran in the opposite direction toward the office door proper, where a hushed conversation ensued followed by the screams of an eighteen-year-old youth, arms grasped tightly by two masked internal security personnel as he was led toward the entrance to the proctor's examining room.

The proctor laughed, fingers entwining across his chest as he peered across the office as the second test subject of the day was led in.

"A male of the species!" the proctor crooned in a sickening and perverse inflection as he eyed now the human resource which been brought forward. "How delightful!"

CHAPTER 21

Wendy watched as the vision slowly faded within the waters of the diseased pool, image of the male figure in the white lab coat dispersing amidst the fell miniscule tide that played out with the quickening of the wind within the forest, further obscured and then finally disappearing altogether under the shadows of the mutated plants which grew around the pool - their unnatural shapes, colors and unknown genus a result of long poisoned earth - the telltale signs of the commandant's apocalyptic wrath visible even in the most would-be natural of growing things. Yet the vegetative life, like the human - and those edging toward something beyond human - was testament to the horror that had been wrought down to the very cellular level of all that remained and all that would remain - a distortion, an abomination, of that which once was.

A small tear trickled down a young cheek as Wendy watched the vision fade - the dripping liquid becoming for a brief moment crystalline in the abnormal light of the shade of the lieutenant's murdered victim which had accompanied her and led her to this spot.

She considered how drastically things had changed - and for the worse - since she and the lieutenant had

departed the commander's headquarters after the proof of treasons within her husband's own ranks had been uncovered. The elation that they had mutually felt faded quickly, like the dissipating mist of a summer dawn. The lieutenant's own resolve, amplified by the killing of the intelligence officer and the more egregious of the traitors, provided no lasting succor as he found himself for all effective purposes a persona non grata on the official level, making the days leading up to the rally even more tedious than the prior waiting. He was being forced into exile - and Wendy with him.

Wendy felt another tear drift down her cheek but not for the lieutenant; though she possessed much affection for him she found her perception more than altered here in the depths of the poisoned forest - the beyond - in the company of the shade as the shadows lengthened in the land's promise of coming darkness.

A thin, curious voice emanated from the glowing orb that housed the shade - so different than the inhuman laughter that the so recently slain had used to taunt the lieutenant, her murderer.

The shade spoke with tenderness - and curiosity - as well as agenda for she by the lieutenant's own hands had been delivered to the very embrace of the Great Demon and already there was much to see, much to know.

"There, there, moonflower" the thin voice whispered, the area around the diseased pool becoming warmer as the orb began to glow more intensely, enveloping their immediate area in a soft, golden light.

"Why do you cry, little one, the man in the white coat?" the shade queried - knowing well the answer and

more.

Wendy fought back a sniffle and responded in a voice so slow and soft that no one but the shade - a creature unnatural - would have been able to hear it.

"My father."

"The proctor your father, ah!" the shade cooed with a delight that Wendy herself found almost inappropriate, not knowing that she had never known her own.

The waters of the pool began to shift, then the golden illumination ensconcing their sanctuary began to dim. The orb of the shade moved closer and then closer still to the tear-streaked face of the little girl in the organizational uniform before her and then from the shade her thin, ghostly voice spoke once again.

"First things first - unnatural things are afoot. What of your husband?"

Wendy nodded, involuntarily, toward the shifting waters of the pool and then - she recalled.

CHAPTER 22

"You are going to suffer, you filth!"

The lieutenant loomed over Wendy, his face contorted in deranged rage, spittle expectorating from betwixt clenched jaws and catching in his thick black mustache as each word was emphasized with the unmistakeable promise of violence. Gaubni himself was his adviser now, speaking words of instruction that only the lieutenant could hear - transmitting his satanic directives directly into the lieutenant's mind. Only through horror could the Great Demon be propitiated - and on this night the woods would resound with the bleak screams of molestation and torture.

Dark forces were afoot in the land as the combined martial forces of the organization lurched towards the borders of their territory - creeping death which would result in mass culling employing new measures terrible in their properties and destructive in purpose. All that could be leveraged in the multi-faceted campaign was being leveraged, evidentiary in the fact that the myriad internal security, intelligence, shock troops and cult recruiters had left the commander's headquarters with visions of the commander and commandant both freshly emblazoned within their visions - the gods-in-flesh-

bodies appearing before them personally, blessing the machines of death and the grim butchers who wielded them.

From the hypercenter - that place where the rivers roiled and flesh melted - the skeletal finger of the commandant extended, sheathed in gleaming black, indicating with sickly intent the amassed sacrifice - its coordinates and properties - properties which would be made anew in her image, conditions which would be made extraordinary. The scorched earth itself served as the sacrificial abattoir in the foothills. Black figures swarmed across the land, a mobilization to which no counter-mobilization was possible.

The lieutenant and Wendy traveled not with the larger number of the troops, nor in the van, but rather alone - a cell of two only - the few remaining of his personal entourage who had not died by his own hands being abandoned back at the commander's headquarters. One plus Gaubni equaled a majority, a maxim to which the adherents of that particular cult adhered and as such the lieutenant considered their present formation to be even more than adequate. His own associates had long been reduced to what would be considered by any estimation fighting lean - now the two of them, himself and Wendy only, perched upon the very edge of the razor in the wake of recent treachery - survival at the grace of their shared patron demon, no safeguards in place, their only real security being a penchant for evil without limits.

Their route followed the progress of the troops albeit in a

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convoluted, labyrinthine fashion - keeping well off the main road that led from the commander's headquarters through the old national forest and avoiding the lone and often insane cultists of innumerable stripes which Wendy had observed before during her trek inward to the nerve-center of the organization - cultists which were as the case may be riddled with intelligence operatives which were to be avoided at all costs, given the lieutenant's present position and posture to recent events as they had unfolded. Wendy had found their travel thus far novel in that they alone shared it, unencumbered by any retinue whatever their genuine loyalty, and in that it gave her opportunities for intense observations into vistas most obscure - her own memory to date prior to her wedding in the tunnel of the Great Demon relegated to the engineering center and then increasingly almost exclusively in the corrugated metal Quonset huts and shacks where her services and favors were forcefully extracted.

She felt that in their shared journey thus far the lieutenant more so than ever relied on her, not merely in the intensity of her being his life-mate, but a full and exacting reliance in that she now took the place of multiple trained organizational personnel - a help meet more blasphemous than biblical in import and nomenclature and inhabiting an environment and in the company of one whose severity knew no natural boundaries. The unnatural was the purview and quintessence of the Great Demon - his appetites unconscionable in even their lightest of applications, profane beyond all reason in earnest. On this night of

nights - what would be her very own dark night of the soul - she would experience the limits and move beyond - her humanity broken irrevocably and the lieutenant, her husband, becoming another link in that chain of terror wrought and refined in that hellish interdimensional force to whom she had been conscripted. The wood wind blew, and terror ensued.

Garment by garment Wendy was denuded of her clothing - she knew this drill, and more often than not reveled in it - though the hideous strength which the lieutenant forcibly emanated and her precognition and empathy spelled something beyond the ordinary afoot, make or break. She had gone this far - driven by the vagaries of fate and the iron-clad concourse of personal destiny - the collective element still to be revealed, waiting in the wings like fell birds of prey, harbingers of dark occult knowledge. When the veil was pulled back, was she ready to receive the wisdom that would be revealed? That revelation would not come on this night - though much else would - her constitution reset, accelerated and altered - a vessel primed for awareness of all that had been and all that would be - in a dark future spread before her, a hunting and field of culling like none other before.

It was this that Wendy focused upon as the cold chill southern winter air enveloped her naked body - her flesh strangely unmarked comparatively to certain times within her sojourn with the lieutenant in the far lands, the lieutenant having slaked his lust and exercised his nearly unbound penchant for punishment and torture freely within the width and breadth of the rally grounds

at headquarters and the inhabiting demographics therein, many of them fresh arrivals. That at the very least had been a liberty which he had been afforded, the fall from officialdom inclusive. She knew that Gaubni demanded much of him and it was the lust of the demon that was slaked as well in the lieutenant's varied and ultimately sadistic moves for satisfaction with his own physiology utilized as proxy - for who could provide as an earthly emissary one like unto him, as equal in bloodshed and applied cruelty in his name?

The thorns began to spread about her, the ground itself and the branches of the trees far above her raising up and curling downward, the snap of branches interspersed with the flora which grew upon it suddenly and anomalously availing itself of the breathing body which inhabited its range of activity and desire. Black thorns, inset with reddish tips at the base, jagged and pointy attached to cord-like chains of thick vine encircled her and lifted her upward, the bondage and piercings of which contorted her naked body into increasingly more helpless and obscene positions of vulnerability.

Upon apprehension of the Great Demon's presence, the lieutenant fell to his knees upon the ground, his eyes rolling back into his head as foam poured from his mouth and excreta and waste poured from his orifices now rendered slack - his consciousness unaware and in another place as the corded bonds of the forest now alive curled around the little girl at the center of Gaubni's attentions, he blinded and within the throes of hallucinations of an existence upon an astral wasteland as the razor-like tips of the thorns pierced the naked

body of little Wendy from every angle, droplets of gore pooling in her midnight black hair as she was lifted further aloft - the initial binding creating a seal, a pact of devilry and supreme human transgression as dangerous currents began to churn within the blood.

As the tightness of the bonds reached its zenith point and commensurately the tautness of her flesh - exposed, pierced and with every possible point of entry revealed with little left to the imagination - the lieutenant began to regain consciousness, though not normative by any stretch. He had been to that very special place - that far alien landscape, secret, harsh and clandestine, one amidst billions of similar arcane domiciles, where Gaubni communed with his faithful in his own personal form, even more intimate than the blasphemous idol that sat as ever-waiting threat within the stumphouse tunnel, and the horrific energies traveled with him - back from the very brink of sanity - to be unleashed with reckless application most brutal upon the earthly plane.

Wendy's mouth hung agape as fresh salty tears streamed down her face though she fought the impetus of facial movement and movement altogether that the pain which coursed through her demanded - for any movement would only increase her torment, digging the black thorns deeper into her flesh, causing the vines upon which they were borne - tactile and sensate - to wind themselves tighter still, for they also, as filaments of Gaubni's will and horrible power, reveled in the torture of his chosen.

Like a hallucination become real, one of the cragged yet still cruelly green branches of the hardwood closest

to the lieutenant lowered itself toward him - he apprehending the phenomena with unconcealed glee and she, Wendy, viewing the scene with dread premeditation of the further horrors that awaited her on this night of all nights - Gaubni's night - where she would be married again in pain and brutal transfiguration to not only the lieutenant but the Great Demon himself in an incestuous and blasphemous union - how incestuous yet to be revealed.

Eyes respectively glaring wide with premeditation of coming sadism and peeled back in fear of the terror to ensue, Wendy watched as the lieutenant grasped the thick branch of the tree within one of his vascular and iron muscled hands, not needing to apply his force to procure the instrument which had been unnaturally proffered to him as the branch separated itself cleanly at the base. Clean only for a time, for within minutes that base would rape little Wendy - the thickish circumference supernaturally separated from the limb - betwixt separated and exposed buttocks and there between the target of a very bestial lust. As the core of the implement thrust again and again deeply into her anus, the lieutenant holding it above his head in an overhand position then coming down like a dagger, necessary due to the way that the thorned vines had arranged themselves about her, ever higher. Her soft round posterior was bloodied to its edges as the three purposefully spaced thorns pierced and then with the base of the strong vine acting as ballast pulling and ever pulling - offering herself more and more predominantly, her sodomy a sacrament.

With several hundred insertions behind him the lieutenant pulled out the base of his wooden whip with a slick, audible motion, the little girl's rectum lubricated with its own filth and the inevitable blooding by dint of the inherent roughness of the instrument - given to the lieutenant by Gaubni himself, its awarding as much an omen of a nature most fell as it was a dispensation - an instrument of horrible properties promising horrible fates awaiting the one who had and would wield it further and the recipient of its ministrations, beyond cruel.

Now within the throes of his own lusts as directed by his patron demon, the lieutenant placed a profane kiss upon the exposed and disturbingly opened path of sodom of his young bride, the filth and blood which seeped from within her commingling with the froth that covered his mouth and dripped from his thick black mustache. Withdrawing and then circling her as would a predator its prey, the lieutenant forced the dripping base of the branch into Wendy's pursed mouth - watching with glee as her soft lips wrapped around the base of the implement, delighting in the soft sounds of choking as he forced the wooden base inch by inch to the place where mouth ended and throat began - causing the nauseating liquid of her own brutal sodomy to seep involuntarily downward.

The beating that followed was a revelation for them both but most transformative and revelatory for Wendy herself - as the inhuman strength with which the lieutenant wielded Gaubni's own instrument necessitated a strength even more inhuman to endure.

Blood flew from the lashings of the whip, supersonic in their delivery, scarring her body beyond any measure that it had been mutilated before by dint of the strange and obscene contortions of her physicality that the twisting thorns had facilitated and the dread might with which the lieutenant laid them on. Blood still continued to seep not only from the wounds of her sodomy but from the stripes which burned themselves onto her flesh, and thus assuaged the incomprehensible appetites of the Great Demon. More onerous than even this were the wounds which could not be seen - small bones fractured, internal organs inflamed by the blood poisoning caused by the poison seals of the fully embedded reddened thorns. Wendy found herself hobbled for days after as she painfully limped along behind the lieutenant, attempting to march apace with his oftentimes breakneck pace despite the winding, circuitous route which they had taken to the experimental region. At the moment that the punishment had come to its completion however, as the vines bearing her body and suspending her aloft slowly lowered in a disturbing fashion before placing her upon the surface of the earth and then releasing, withdrawing, all she could see was her own eyes - from a vantage point above - in her world but somehow beyond it - a mirror into what she was then and what she soon would be.

CHAPTER 23

Wendy looked down upon the waters of the pool, her last vision being her own eyes on that night looking up at her - a communion self to self - seemingly separated by time which had folded into itself, becoming one in that moment, whether by the properties of the oracle afforded to her by the shade or by Gaubni himself, the three of them now - including the shade - a triumvirate acting in concert.

Wendy pulled her knees up against her chest, her tears flowing freely now in the remembrance that the shade had forced her to revisit - an episode of torment which she still bore so many weeks after, the rigors to which she had been subjected not easily set aside.

Though the posture and disposition of the shade indicated compassion, in what little Wendy could discern from the nature of what amounted to at least in visible and audible comprehension as an orb of light, from which emanated a thin voice of a child slightly younger than she herself now discorporate - the blood of whom still lay fresh upon her corpse back at the base of the wreckage and refuse in the more cultivated parts of the experimental areas, and even then, inhabiting the periphery - she herself felt only horror. Pain which she had previously endured had been forcibly revisited

upon her and for this she did not feel grateful in the slightest.

She wondered, however, at the sight of the one long forgotten - her father - the proctor - there in the engineering center still, if the vision before the last had been current, indicating that he still went about his insane work and insane experiments there in the engineering center. The memories of the source of her conception were vague at best though in the few instances in which she had encountered the proctor in times which she could readily remember he was adamant in indicating that he was her sire.

There was no love to be had in such remembrances, though she was curious as to the fact that he had not availed himself of molestation of his own daughter, Wendy herself - a dubious pleasure to which most of the men there at the engineering center would have readily executed, the furtherance of incest being not only an ever-present proclivity but in fact an organizational mandate in the cause of blood purity. His attentions had laid elsewhere - in the furtherance of his research predominantly, an obsession itself, and in sexual liaisons with males of his own age - the proctor's uranian orientation set in granite. In this she had been spared her father's touch but comparatively with zero familial holds had been thrown to the snarling dogs - used and abused at will by all and sundry in the evil and chaotic environment that was the engineering center. The only silver lining in this situation had been that the dynamic in place had set her squarely on the path in which she had come face to face with the one that would become

her husband. Even that, now, was in the by and by - for she was now, by her own choice, in another environment and in the company of one altogether other - far enough now into the forest bordering the wilderness and perhaps in the preliminary areas of the wilderness itself that even the shrieks of madness emanating from the lieutenant could now no longer be heard.

"It is time to discover your origins - the bloodline," spoke the shade, her ghostly voice causing the tears upon Wendy's face to become chill.

"Let me take you back to the beginning."

Wendy wiped the tears from her eyes, now cold and sickeningly slick against her face, her weeping now ceased as beneath her the current of the small pool once again began to shift disturbingly, the faintest visions of figures within becoming slowly visible. Wendy's head tilted for better vantage of the vision which was now ready to present itself to her, and then the shade spoke again, and for the last time.

"What of your mother?"

CHAPTER 24

Sadie kicked her feet and struggled against her mother's firm grasp over her back, inhaling violently as Mommy began smacking her pale, taut little thighs - a warning to Sadie that she should do as mother told - to take her punishment, like a big girl.

Sadie was a big girl, all of twelve, and lived in the fallout shelter there down the rough concrete hatch and through subsequent tunnel, strewn with rubble, that led to the chamber which she shared with her mother.

That said, she was often alone - Mommy spending most of her time, including many days and nights entirely absent, there in the farm house beyond the field but still visible from the hatch, the structure sitting upon a lonely plains hillside, more a barn than a house.

"Sadie, you are getting a sound smacking on your bottom because you broke the rules!"

Year after year, a collocation of grinding days into months, Sadie would hear the words or semblance of them as the iron-like, powerful hands of her mother rained down crack upon resounding crack on her bared naked cheeks, resounding shame as she stared, face and eyes wettened with tears, upon the filth encrusted plastic

laminate frame inside of which was a photograph of the commandant.

Sadie's mommy, Sadie knew well, knew the commandant and, unlike produced, artistic images utilized by other cultists, the image within the frame upon which Sadie now stared was an actual photograph - her mommy had taken it herself many years ago at a secret base while on a secret assignment; the rest of the details Sadie knew not.

With a painful matronly grip upon her ear and a last admonishment Sadie was given leave and withdrew herself from her mother's lap, nearly tripping in a humiliating dance as her small black shorts pooled at her ankles - taking several halting steps forward then falling to her knees in supplication before the photograph of the commandant.

The photograph was a blasphemous relic - sacred to the cult - Sadie doubted that many cultists except a few surviving from formidable days and these more than likely very high-tier in station knew of its existence. Blasphemous in that it represented - and glorified - the death of the planet and all that that had entailed and did entail.

For where others, suffering as suffer they must in the decades since the nuclear wars, sought to bring some semblance of normality back to existence, albeit in a ruined and now thoroughly unnatural world, the organization only sought to bring all down to rub their faces in the very smell of sulfur upon scorched earth - glorying in the catastrophe, death and chaos of the past and seeking to go beyond even that - not an ascent but

rather a full-throttled descent at breakneck speed into new levels of subterranean hellishness, ever evolving, ever creative.

Sadie looked to the commandant - the source of all that she knew in the desolate windswept landscape of the plains, of her life, of her mother - the only other human she had ever remembered knowing other than herself. She knew that Mommy communicated to the outside for Mommy was a technician - it was that and the deductions Sadie had made as to why they had, year after long year, cohabited together alone in such bleak isolation presumably far, far away from the areas where the commander made his headquarters and where the commandant dwelt in her secret, punitive dungeons beneath the fortress-like infrastructure of the former federal penitentiary.

From the photograph Sadie could ascertain some degree of geographic demarcation. Behind the commandant could be seen the deep-green boughs of high trees growing straight up from the ground, their greenery swaying in a much lesser wind than the area here attached to tall pines - "pine needles" her mother had told her, with a smile, upon her inquiry as a toddler so many years back, inquisitive about a foliage not seen in the land of her home. Flanking either side of the copse of evergreen forest was the near as high crossed metal fencing topped with layers upon layers of concertina wire, shimmering still in still depiction despite the graininess of the photograph.

Sadie knew that these locales were to the east - far to

the east. The area in which the photograph was taken, further east even than the commander's headquarters, was set upon a small inlet - a peninsula point - an area which had been key in the organization's development even prior to the wars.

To the west, the areas beyond the bunker, the old farm house and the endless dreary plains, were the areas that had once housed the missile silos - points of nuclear departure for a government long dead.

These areas had been obliterated by atomic bombs - yet only after shortly prior those same missile silos had dispatched their own terrible projectiles bearing lethal payloads - hurtling into the atmosphere and traversing country and sea before effecting just as ghastly death upon those - enemies then, both victims, now - thousands of miles away. None now knew the fate of those lands, also destroyed, but Sadie could imagine that it was also as horrific - perhaps even more so - than the horror that had enveloped North America.

As Sadie stared into the photograph - the candid effect somehow making the commandant seem even more dangerous and so much more real than the photo-realistic representations on the small devotional cards widely disseminated by the cult recruiters, of which she had several - she felt the hands of her mother upon her shoulders, gently pressing her down so that her reddened buttocks rested on her heels and the black cloth of her shorts situated about her ankles. Sadie lowered her hands, thus far having been pressed together in prayer before the commandant, lowering

them to her thighs and taking a long, shuddering breath, choking back her sobs.

Sadie felt the hot breath of her mother upon her neck, then the feel of Mommy's wet tongue licking the salty tears from her face, kissing them away before hands began to snake their way up her shirt, beneath the tight-fitting black fabric grasping breasts nearly flat, small due to Sadie's youth though stunted in development by the near starvation level rations which the wilderness plains yielded only in fits and starts and requiring maximum effort at procurement for near minimum survival yield.

Now within her pubescence Sadie's eyes rolled back into her head in pleasure, the exhalation of her choking breath the result of another sensation - pain and pleasure melded together in an increasingly heady synthesis, one which she had known for many years by dint of her mother's strict disciplinarian nature and almost as equal penchant for molestation, yet one which was becoming ever more potent due to her own hormonally driven psycho-physical development.

"Open your eyes, dearest darling - look to the commandant, imagine that it is she feeling you, for she is your real mother - the mother of us all, now..."

Mommy punctuated the last word with a sharp pinch of Sadie's nipple, which brought Sadie to alertness with a soft gasp and then, obedient to her mother's request, she stared forth into the image once again - that same image into which she had stared for thousands upon thousands of hours in similar circumstances in that same place, so familiar, so bleak, yet always revelatory due to their shared love - their cohabitation - their

incestuous existence as mother and daughter, as disciplinarian and disciplined, as sisters and co-conspirators.

Sadie brought her arms up to massage her mother's own as they caressed her, thin fingers grasping thin yet tightly muscled arms and then withdrawing - Sadie's arms extending upward as her mother removed her shirt and knelt behind her - the sensation of her mother's uniform slowly, sensually grinding against her, arms entwining around Sadie's middle in a matronly, sisterly, loving embrace which made the tears begin to fall again from the daughter's eyes - not this time in pain but in rapturous melding together.

Sadie stared at the photograph of the commandant, crossing her own arms back over her mother's as she stared with now choking sobs at the image of the commandant - the commandant's arms so like her mother's own, her stature so similar - so selfsame, minus that regal attire of apocalyptic dread which attired the former.

"She is watching you, dearest Sadie, she is watching you - you holding her, she holding you. It is her own voice that you hear now, dear girl."

Emotions rose ever further within Sadie at her mother's words - her command prompt - yet as she stared at the image of the commandant, in obedience outwardly yet rife with intrigue within her own self, internally, she wondered to what depths her mother's words were cult psycho-drama and to what degree they might, beyond all cult manipulation - beyond that which was effective, but deceptive - be truth.

Sadie ran her hands down against mommy's forearms, her tactile fingertips flittering over the musculature thereupon, whilst staring, firmly, tears now beginning to dry, the analytical portion of her mind subsuming emotions ever more lusty and heated, upon the physicality of the commandant in the photograph.

Was not the posture, the haughtiness intermingled with grimness most profound, not that of her own mother - that biological mother which knelt behind her now?

She slid her hands across her mother's arms as they gripped her, pressed upon youthful breasts, surveying her mother's arms by touch - fingertips tracing upon lines of muscle separation and the tell-tale scars of years gone by - considering, assessing.

Insofar as Sadie could tell, the proportions were identical.

Was it? Could it be?

Her thoughts were interrupted as Mommy withdrew her arms and pressed one firm hand upon her upper back - pushing her forward so that Sadie's hands now were planted on the rough concrete floor of the bunker, naked buttocks still situated upon heels but now thrust out even more obscenely - Mommy licking her lips apprehending the comparative fatness of her daughter's posterior, now so accentuated by the posture so induced, in comparison to the otherwise emaciated human frame.

Sadie shuddered involuntarily as her mother began to knead her buttocks, yet still wrenching her

consciousness toward the image of the commandant.

There, the splayed fingers upon utility belt bearing myriad instruments of lethality and torment, now - upon her exposed naked young flesh - the same.

"Say her name, Sadie, say it!" growled Mother, as she depressed one hand further still in pressure upon the small of her daughter's back, causing Sadie to thrust her posterior out even more obscenely.

Another matronly hand raised high in the air behind her then crashed down outstretched upon one buttock, then another, fingers splayed, reddening the already thoroughly crimson flesh.

After each strike, according to instruction, Sadie shouted out the name of the commandant - amazed even after all this time how the iron-like hands of her mother, they alone, were capable of inflicting such pain - their foul touch more painful in fact that any instrument and implement of punishment that her mother sometimes seldomly wielded. Her mother's physical strength seemingly inhuman - her propensity for discipline and incest nearly insatiable.

Tears fell down like rain as she shouted the name of the commandant - high-strung emotion at her realization intermingling with the pain of discipline - for she knew now, within herself, without a doubt, that it was her mother that she saw in that old photograph. The evidence of another life beyond the plains.

Had she herself been born there, in that strip of bomb-scarred land on that peninsula point, ensconced within the churning of the rivers of the Albemarle? Or had her mother - the commandant - been sent afield - far

afield - in order to hide the pregnancy or, perhaps, a shared mission - part responsibility and part consequence - a secret assignment, in isolation, in a secret place?

Snaps of vision entered in Sadie's mind betwixt and amidst the cracks of mommy's hands upon her naked flesh and her screams of the name - commandant.

The black-clad arms placed haughtily upon the side of either black-clad thigh, head situated within a peculiar, pointed black mask reared back in disdain and hatred - the hallucinatory drifting forward and back of the pine needles in the wind.

Sadie began to laugh to herself internally as she saw herself flying like a bat, her vision its vision, through the landscapes of the grid - throughout the rural Perquimans County night there on the point - drifting, unnaturally, throughout the hot sky in the areas behind the gates, behind mother commandant, where the landscape was suffused in the blackest of clandestine elements, as testament by the festering, burning craters of exploded ordnance - where the black vans carried their horrible cargo hither and thither, testing the ways in which death could be effected by mechanical assassination delivered by human hand.

She saw the ruins of mock compounds, walls blackened and crumbling, facsimiles of actual residences which were now only cinder and ash thousands of miles across the violent waters of the Atlantic and interior seas closer to target. She saw non-nondescript black vehicles carrying deadly cargo quietly to various drab buildings bearing within horrible secrets, centers of testing,

experimentation and vast conspiracy funded by pallets of non-traceable cash bearing randomized serial numbers upon each bill. On the coast of the point, the brackish waters of the sound lapping up against concrete bulwarks, the point of launch for training exercises of a clandestine maritime nature. Sadie saw all these things, through the eyes of the bat, as she flittered and spun across the darkening twilight of the point.

Slowly she came to her waking consciousness in her own body, the first sounds being that of the mother's hands striking her naked flesh with open palms and the second being her own voice, which now no longer shouted nor spoke the name of the mother commandant but elicited gibberish in low, garbled tones as the realization struck her, the mechanism of the secret unlocked by that which she had seen in her discorporate, shape-shifting form.

Mother leaned into her then, hands ceasing to strike but cradling, lovingly caressing her daughter's form as it instinctively, involuntarily leaned back into her own - pale white back resting upon the front of mother's black BDU uniform jacket - mother's mouth and lips leaning toward Sadie's ear and depressing upon the same in a single profane, incestuous kiss.

She whispered then to her daughter, in the inhuman voice indicative of cult recruiter training - yet this voice in fact the voice of the very one whom the cult recruiters trained to serve and emulate, the depth and potency of which caused reverberations throughout the bunker causing Sadie's internal organs to vibrate disturbingly, heart beating arrhythmically, intestines boiling.

"You are right, my dear child... so very right..." mother purred, her long, outstretched fingers petting Sadie's hair absently.

"Now you know our secret, and the secret that is us. Never forget it, daughter - never, ever forget it."

Sadie heard the spoken words of her mother turning from the distorted cult voice into the unintelligible sounds of harsh electronic distortion and the audible report of machinery grinding into itself violently - screeching, destructive, horrible.

As her eyes fluttered open amidst her sobs and rapture, Sadie could see mother commandant's eyes upon her, bestial, sensual lips curled back in a satanic grin which transformed into a hellish leering as eyes locked with Sadie's own.

The hand that had caressed her hair snaked down, nails scratching downward across naked sides before curling beneath Sadie's bottom, one finger, then two, then three, inserting themselves cruelly into her daughter's rectum. Sadie shook her head violently at the sudden molestation, a physical reaction as was the violent blood rushing to her face, tear ducts opening unnaturally and pouring salty water of life upon the wettened, crimson flesh.

With her other hand mother commandant grasped Sadie's arm and placed it so that her daughter's hand rested upon her sex, mother's own expert hand guiding her daughter's so that it might find that place which would most please her - Sadie.

"Touch yourself while I am punishing you," growled Mommy - part question, coyly stated, part command - all

threat.

Mother punctuated this statement with a deeper thrusting into her daughter's entrails, causing Sadie to gasp then gasp again as she reactively began inserting her own fingers into her vagina, matching her masturbation rhythmically with the thrusts of her mother's long fingers thrusting sadistically and brutally into her backside.

Painful at first yet pain turning into disturbing pleasure Sadie began bucking against her mother's sodomy, her own fingers flittering across her now wet, slick sex and aching clitoris in blurring speed as she remembered the fluttering of the bat and the careening, humid landscape of the point.

As her eyes closed and her mouth opened, panting for release as the sexual tension built, what sounded like the crackling of logs upon a fire seemed to be heard from far in the distance - above-ground - beyond the hatch. Gradually the sounds came closer and closer still until she realized that it was the sound of automatic gunfire - a sound beckoning back to her youngest childhood.

Mother withdrew instantly, gesturing that Sadie should dress and, bringing a long finger pressed against cruel lips, still moist from incestuous sodomy, indicating that Sadie should remain silent.

Fear and confusion flooded her mind as Sadie pulled up her black shorts and buttoned them close. She had worn them for many more years now than she should and although they fitted over her starved belly her ever lengthening legs and the increasing curvatures of pubescence caused a fit ultra-tight over her hips,

stretched and causing the lower part of her buttocks, now angry red, to be exposed in salacious display.

The grating sound of steel upon concrete and the hatch was opened. Sadie looked back to her mother, both now standing, as Mother steadily backed toward the far wall, walking backward, her finger still upon lips, telling her to hush, her other hand held open at her side indicating that Sadie should remain stationary.

Tears began to fall down Sadie's face, lips quivering, as she looked to her mother, questioning, frightful. The sound of clattering came from the tunnel, from the hatch, something solid falling, bouncing down the rusted ladder along the concrete tube that led to the subterranean shelter.

A flash of light was followed immediately by a loud bang that reverberated deafeningly throughout the bunker, causing small bits of debris and rubble from the exit to the tunnel that led to the hatch to fly through the air, small rocks pummeling and embedding themselves into Sadie's body. As she fell to the floor, there on the grey unyielding surface beneath the image of the commandant where she had so recently received the revelations of a lineage most dread, she turned her head, now bloodied, hair matted in crimson and, through the smoke and dust, viewing for one last time, before unconsciousness took her, the figure of her mother - standing, eyes rapt and fierce, as black-clad individuals in organizational garb swarmed toward her. Sadie thought that she could see the curl of a smile upon her mother's mouth and then - all became black.

CHAPTER 25

When Sadie awoke she was no longer underground, but instead lying on the field of green grass just below the rise of the hill - the hatch several hundred yards aft and the barn, her mother's workshop, rising ominously in roughly the opposite direction.

She remembered little - neither being conveyed to such a place nor the aftermath since her vision had faded - but she remembered invasion, and she remembered what she had seen and what she had been told before the grenade exploded in her and her mother's lair.

As her waking consciousness asserted itself she winced painfully as she came to the apprehension of the many small chunks of rubble that had embedded themselves into her body. Sadie slowly raising herself and picking the shrapnel away, leaving small, bloody suppurations upon her flesh. More blood, but older, sticky to the touch, adorned her crown and large black and purple bruises adorned her head and the side of one leg.

The planned, domestic pain that her mommy had inflicted in what seemed now so long ago yet only in reality an instant past was nothing to the aching in her physicality that she now felt - physical and psychological shards of exploded chaos causing horrible torment upon

body and mind, yet feral, enraged, she rose - surveying with an assessing eye the tell-tale signs of carnage which surrounded her. A blanket of smoke lay upon the land, several large areas of charred earth from localized explosions and the pock-marks of automatic gun fire penetrating the earth.

There was a palpable sense of nothingness as she surveyed the landscape - for while the signs of death-dealing ordnance were well apparent there was neither sign of victim nor of assailant.

As her eyes adjusted to the harshness of the exploded areas she could spy, in the distance, an area where flames flickered and from whence the smoke emanated - a charred, lifeless corpse, blackened with accents of grey ash as the flames erupted in spits and starts with the bursting of human fat.

A tearing, gripping sense of terror and dread wrenched Sadie's consciousness - a howl erupting from the depths of her guts as she ran, recklessly through the smoke, toward the immolation of the body.

From the lifeless form Sadie could feel the grin of death bearing down upon her - the shades of the inhabiting spirit winding their way through the flickering of flame and smoke, edging slowly toward her, black filaments extending closer and ever closer. She could feel those shades, those gangrenous clans of swarming, possessing undead entities entering her now, through eyes, through the pores of flesh, through every orifice and through every psychological point of weakness, fear and paranoia which gripped her - the secret routes by which the undead would now take

possession of her mind.

Sadie's eyes widened, widened and widened further still - her hands outstretched beside herself, shaking, face curling into a reddened visage of indescribable rage then letting out a howl as she flung herself upon the pyre, screaming the name of her mother, even as her mother watched - there, upon the hillside - a satanic grin curling across her face briefly before she turned, descending, her form disappearing upon the opposite side of the hill.

Before Sadie could hurt herself irrevocably there upon the burning embers several internal security members burst forth from behind several pieces of large rubble, grabbing her roughly by the arm and flinging her to the ground away from the flames. As two of them trained the gleaming points of their MP5 machine guns upon her head the other began smashing out of the fire of the funerary pyre and in so doing desecrating the charred corpse laying thereupon with one booted foot as the screeches of rage from Sadie resounded from behind him.

CHAPTER 26

Days went into days and then upon weeks and months as Sadie dwelt there, in the underground bunker and the area immediately around it, her mother presumed to be dead. The desecrated, smashed blackened corpse which had sent her the possessing spirits since toted away on the backs of hellish, goblin-like shock troopers to an area even closer to her position in a gesture of their mockery - every instance of death for them being an invitation to grisly revelry.

Days were lost as she wandered aimlessly, long hours spent in grief and mourning within the underground bunker - staring into the image on the altar of the commandant, which had been left unmolested, trying to recreate, futilely, the pastimes that she and mother commandant had spent.

In her mind Sadie believed her mother to be dead, but also held to the conviction that the spirits which had inhabited the corpse were now her own - and that her progenitor lived on within her, writhing through the most minute interstices of her DNA and RNA molecular structure.

There, in the plains, landscape rarely marked by the

seldom tree, she could see the organizational forces watching - waiting - assessing. Upon one rise a black van, figures clothed in black uniforms and black masks, horrid goggles of vision attached to the latter, each one toting a lethal, greased automatic assault rifle in black-gloved hands. They stared down onto the small portion of plain surrounding the hatch hour after hour, day after day, week after week leading into months - changing shift every half day - guarding the pass.

On another rise were others, similar internal security units, as well as the black-robed cult recruiters who entered and exited at regular intervals through the doors of the old farmhouse upon the hill where her mommy had spent so many hours in secret, clandestine toil.

The supplies down in the bunker, always meager, began to dwindle very quickly without her mother providing and in the absence of mother's acumen for culling the needful from the land. Sadie knew that there were more supplies up at the old farmhouse, however her passage there was blocked - the few times that she had attempted to approach it she had been greeted with a warning volley of shots from the internal security personnel while still several hundred yards off, the earth ahead of her rupturing under rapid fire.

As the telltale signs of starvation slowly began to set in - long, manic conversations with an imagined form of her mother there, underground, and attempts to mimic her mother's own incestuous, sexual touches turning to horror as she watched as her skin became papery and hard to the touch while her sex began to become

bloodied via extreme topical sensitivity - though her menses had long since ceased from malnutrition - at around that time the small care packages began to be left during the night on the plain not too far off from the opening of the hatch.

She wondered to herself as she opened the packages why they were coming now and why if they were to come at all had they been so very late in the coming - but she was not in a position to argue nor in a position to deny needful sustenance from whatever source. Still, she refused to walk toward the rise on the other hill opposite the farmhouse where the black vans waited and the cult recruiters stood, their black robes flapping in the wind - their lethal counterparts in internal security, black, masked and horribly anonymous standing point. Sadie had not sought the mercy nor favors of the contingent who had murdered her mother - though the undead shades which traveled with the lightning pacing of electrical bursts through the synapses of her brain spoke to her of plots within plots, secrets and conspiracies that indicated to her that she would not shake them despite their guarded truce.

When she found the first package she approached it with much caution - her first thought that it may very well be a concealed incendiary device to dispatch her in a burst of explosive fire much the same way she presumed that her mother had gone - a creative means to eradicate a potentially problematic witness, suicide by curiosity brought on by hunger. Sadie had crawled toward it, carefully, on her hands and knees - traveling through the swaying grass eying the small roundish

package wrapped tightly in yellowing plastic and fastened shut with fraying twine. Sadie watched, listened then retreated, coming back with objects to throw at it from afar - then with a long antennae, remnants of her mother's work, to prod it from what she considered may possibly be a safe distance - though she wrapped her face in shreds of black cloth she had found in the rubble of the bunker in case, a potential extra layer of protection, the flash bangs she had experienced in the bunker seared into and very fresh in her memory.

After some hours, as the day led into late afternoon with the promise of soon twilight, Sadie allowed herself to at long last procure the package - almost feeling the eyes of the cult recruiters there on the ridge staring down at her, mockingly, as they watched her long testing of the object, their bait. Sadie's face curled into a grimace as she approached the parcel - now standing upright on her own two feet once again - the black cloth she had worn upon her face now discarded, carried careening and absently away from her and the hatch in the eddies of the almost ever-present winds. Better to blow herself up than suffer the smug remote condescension of these murderesses even one minute longer, she thought to herself.

She tested the package one last time, opening it slightly to reveal a trace of the contents and testing the tug and pull of the twine to ascertain if the opening might still yet trigger some mechanism - an explosive or trap. Satisfied at last that the parcel was at least benign on an overt level she cradled it into the nook of her arm, taking one last look toward the yonder hillside

mustering and sending forth her most hateful glare toward the cult recruiters and their lackeys. Sadie turned and proceeded toward her subterranean home as the sun descended behind the western hills - a single tear dripping down her face as she premeditated another night alone - the feel and presence of her mother becoming ever more distant.

Once down the hatch, through the tunnel and into the bunker she situated herself, cross-legged, before the altar bearing the photograph of the commandant. Should her acceptance of the package be in error then she would let Mommy view her in her very folly, though in truth she had predominantly situated herself thus so that she could receive mother commandant's blessings and in a belief that the watchful eye from within the photograph itself might offer her some protection should all go not as planned.

Sadie pulled the twine away from the parcel with a few easy gestures, having already been loosened appreciably in her earlier, tentative explorations of the same there in the open under the sight of the organizational forces. With a trembling hand she drew back the layers of plastic to reveal a single gelatinous block, the color of teak, beside that a hardened piece of cured meat, ample in portion, along with three long and slender, yet substantial in content, bottles of clear liquid.

Severely dehydrated, her first go-to was one of the bottles - wrenching the cap from the top and upending it in large, hearty swallows - potential danger be damned. She felt no sense of tampering after she had drunk the

liquid to its last drop, nothing more than water that she could ascertain, yet the sensation of the needful hydration - and the psychological surety of more to come, given that she had still two bottles left - left her reeling in an ecstasy that would easily mirror any drug. Sadie was now alive - and more so than before - that a signal to her and corroborated by those intelligences which dwelt within her that she was not the target for assassination by the cult recruiters and the organizational forces - not yet.

A tearing into the dried meat and her mouth salivated in recognition - human flesh. Charred, old and smoky yet still oily with fat. Sadie curled her fingers around either side of the flesh and buried her mouth into it, snarling ferally, purring, as the body meat replenished her, renewed her.

"More, more!" she growled, the last of the meat gliding downward, half-chewed, down her throat, her eyes wide and manic.

Another of the bottles of water was consumed and then Sadie began to sup upon the cube of gelatinous substance, nothing that she ever remembered from sight but which she could somehow grasp from some memory of very early youth in the experience of its consumption. The taste was much different than the human flesh, much more unnatural and strange in quality, yet she could tell that the block contained human proteins as well - rendered corpse-meat - diluted, transformed, blasphemously accelerated by the organization's own careful designs.

Before long that too had been consumed and, taking

one tentative sip of the third bottle, she drifted, curled in the fetal position before the altar of the commandant, into a deep slumber, a new found strength now coursing through her body by dint of the sustenance so imbibed, visions of a future unknown manifesting from deep within her subconsciousness and then disappearing as quickly as they appeared while the indwelling shades counseled her, cruelly so, with prompts and ideas often contradictory in nature. All became black and she was far from waking apprehension as the sole internal security member crept down from the hillside - a black silhouette upon the plain - opening the hatch ever so carefully and inserting a small vial through the crack which, upon hitting the floor, began to exude a noxious, greenish smoke. Upon the hill the watching cult recruiters smiled.

CHAPTER 27

In the plains and there in the bunker days passed into days in the midst of what seemed to be an endless dark night of the soul, time passing in a strange and eerily fluid fashion - sometimes seeming to move forward, sometimes moving back - not unlike the brown, brackish waters of the point which Sadie remembered from the revelations of her origin.

Some days she would spend almost entirely in the bunker, sometimes in complete blackness depending on her mood, spending inordinate hours in disturbed sleep and near hallucinatory contemplation - only venturing forth as the sun began setting on the western horizon to procure her rations which were left each day by the cult recruiters, steady, reliable, like clockwork.

Upon one hillside she could see the internal security and cult recruiters there beside the van, watching, predatory - sometimes only their silhouettes in the near darkness then sometimes the figures illuminated in the cold glow of the lighting devices which they utilized as they prepared their camp for the nocturnal portion of their watch. On occasion she could catch snippets of the conversation between the internal security personnel, muted voices drifting down upon the wind, describing acts of horror and atrocity in which they had engaged

and gleefully relaying, in explicit detail, acts of perversion in which they contemplated engaging in future.

The voices of the cult recruiters she could not apprehend audibly yet she could feel them - a nauseating rumble through her intestines, a cold, diseased sweat breaking upon her brow even amidst the chill of the twilight air. They stood - witch-like and malignant - watching their quarry. Each and every night they would send the lone internal security personnel down into the valley, towards the hatch, placing the time-released chemical capsule into the opening, another dose, always clandestine, never discovered.

All possible lusts roiled within Sadie as she spent her time as a captive, iron hand covered in soft leather - or leastwise iron hand restraining and all the more psychologically cruel, for she knew that at any time they could fly down the hill and seize her should they wish, yet, they chose not to - not for now. Instead they engaged her in a bizarre waiting game, yet, outside of her knowledge, the organization was playing a much higher-tier game indeed - as the airborne chemicals warped her mind, hour upon hour, the wisps of smoke being breathed in each and every night into her small lungs, heavily, in her sleep. The cult recruiters were processing her and relying on the narcotics, engineered on commission from their group particularly, to do their work for them - for now. Their black devices would facilitate the ripening - they would come, at choicest moment so dictated by them, for the harvest.

Sadie writhed upon the filth-encrusted floor of the bunker in utter darkness, her black shorts pulled up between her buttocks ever more obscenely so by her frenzied movements, her tattered black strappy shirt pulled up and over her flat chest, overgrown fingernails of each hand twitching insanely in unhealthy, spastic motion, fluttering idly over her sickly mottled nipples.

As her eyes rolled back into her head, pupils dilated and wild, and as sweet, pale white foam begin to dribble from her mouth, Sadie could remember scenes from her lineage. Not only the memories of herself, briefly, with the commandant at the point but memories of the commandant herself in clandestine service in times before, the commandant's own memories bequeathed now to daughter, vision as seen through the eyes of her maternal line - recollections of black operations in lands far beyond the sound and across the outer banks, on the other side of the great ocean and then to the lands that acted as the human hosts for the bloody work of those acting within that wilderness of mirrors - the non-disclosed shadow side of the servants of the Great Satan.

She laughed abjectly as she saw the horrible, cavernous black sites - the bleak, warehouse-like structures set on grim desert landscapes - the howls of jackals, the litter of abandoned, whitened bones and ever-present hellish heat surrounding even more poisonous dealings inside those vast metal buildings, those above-ground dungeons. These were the living, writhing blood banks of the Great Satan and the commandant, the commander and their minions were

the hidden operators who kept the furnaces of such hells aflame, behind endless cryptonyms, secret warrants and hidden liaisons with the most despotic regimes and secret police services that the earth then possessed. These were the origins of the organization.

With a hideous will Sadie infiltrated her consciousness into the form of the bat, traversing time and space, circling and careening insanely on currents of hot, desert wind. Above she could spy the vultures, circling, for their own prey, and there on the filthy floor of the bunker she in her girlish, physical form laughed insanely, throat constricting yet pain unrecognized, flecks of blood flying from her open mouth as the organization's drugs dealt their continuing and highly unethical toll on her physicality. Sadie laughed because she knew that the capabilities of the vultures were far, far beneath her own - for it was she and she alone in the desert who was that most fell and foul monarch of surveillance - darting wildly throughout the night - toward then over and above the glistening razor-wire of the installation, her course unencumbered by the pinch-faced, sadistic guards with their death-dealing, mechanical weaponry. No human without proper security and protocol would pass the large bay doors without grisly death, but she would - for she was her father's insignia.

As her black, leathery form sliced through the air near the top opening of the huge bay doors - it being the only horrible lantern in the near impenetrable blood-stained darkness of the desert – Sadie, there, in human

self, gripped the hem of her black shorts and pulled them down, exposing corpse-white buttocks, then depressing on the concrete surface and above angry, diseased sex. Raising her legs toward her torso and flittering the yellowish nail of one dirty finger across her sex and then slowly, slowly inserting it into her pursed rectum - inhaling so profoundly at the penetration that blood vessels began bursting upon her face, starbursts microbranding themselves permanently upon her visage - she, in discorporate form, flew through corridor upon corridor of the black site, the lengths and depths of the turns and processions from one corridor to another passing in time with each manifestation of the stigmata on her face.

At last, finally, she exhaled, as the bat settled itself, inverted, upon a corroded pipe - pumping the filthy waters from cisterns uplifted downward toward the taps which provided the drinking water and the gallons upon gallons utilized for the water-boarding of the detainees - both their sustenance and undoing. The sadistic, fresh-faced, black-booted youth who guarded the installation and the black operatives within drank from cleaner filtrated waters, yet, in an entirely primal calculation for their purposes, the representatives of the United States within that land felt it both more appropriate and cost-effective to maintain the local fare for local populace - the devil one knows, but in divers forms.

With animal eyes blind but with the eyes of black wizardry so very alive Sadie stared through the small grate upon the steel prison door opposite her vision - spying into a damp cell that had been converted into an

office and operating station of the most zenith level of clandestine services personnel. Her father was there, the commander - his tell-tale mask was thrown aside and his face was livid, pale and sweating as he rummaged through a pile of bullets upon the far floor of the cell.

Closer to the doorway Sadie could spy her mommy - her sweet, horrible mommy - foul, horrible, horrific mother commandant - also denuded of mask most characteristic - sharp, animal-like teeth chewing mindlessly upon the end of a thinnish black night-stick held threateningly in her right hand as she eyed her lover against the far wall - supping idly upon the stress chemicals which emanated from him and which she absorbed, leisurely, parasitical. The commander sought a certain bullet, matched to a certain shell casing which had been used in the execution of a young civilian in the area. The commandant laughed because in her other hand, that not holding the night-stick, she herself held that very bullet for which her lover sought - she, herself, the shooter - yet it curled there, amidst long, witchy fingers, before she inserted it into her back pocket, left hind, and moved in with the clipped gait of a master predator upon her male prey - the cacophonous laughter of abominable aeons shattering within her mind, like the dead, dripping descent of black stars, subsumed into backwards vortexes beyond human comprehension.

The black, pock-marked neck of the bat twitched and there on the floor of the bunker Sadie's cheeks crinkled in a rare smile as she dwelt in the ever horrid depths within the horrible scenes which unfolded before her.

In her upside-down vision she spied through the grate the commander grasping a handful of the bullets and then throwing them wildly across the room, an inhuman screech of rage emanating from his chest and his mouth bellowing hot, putrid saliva, huge, muscled body turning to and fro upon its formidable trunk in paranoid rage, eyes wide-opened, bloodshot and intense.

Mother commandant reveled in the violent outburst, the hand which had just concealed the bullet fibrillating conspiratorially alongside left hip pocket and the other holding the nightstick - long, seeking fingers entwining upon its hardness in a sadistic and baldly sexual anticipation as she stalked forward.

He turned toward her like a rabid beast and smiling she swept her free arm across the expanse of the cell, fingers pointing toward the still-bloodied skulls upon onyx plinths upon far wall - reddened, glistening bone, denuded of their skins. The commander nodded and smiled in turn as he watched the finger of the commandant point from one remnant of sacrificial victim to another - grinning death-masks shining in their covering of brain fluids, blood and greasy fat, exuding a nearly overwhelming stench in the very close confines of that most executive of cells.

"These are all your victims, husband, do not trifle about the one that got away... we are almost entirely certain that just deserts were given and that due credit will be given where credit is due. And we are sure that any inconsistencies can be dealt with, for the clerks and paper-pushers are very pliable..."

The commandant writhed her hips in sensual motion

in emphasis of her statement, insane eyes drifting from each wet, dripping skull and then to the form of the commander before her - his attention now entirely riveted on her threatening form, the bullets entirely forgotten as those still within his grasp fell clattering upon the damp grey foundation of the cell as his eyes met her own and began roving lustily up and down her sadistic physicality - his visage curling into a horrible smile, cold sweat breaking upon his brow.

Mother commandant pursed her lips and narrowed her eyes upon her quarry and there upon the filthy pipe the inverted bat watching through the grate writhed its leathery wings about its body, settling tautly in anticipation of incestuous revelation.

The commander began shifting his eyes to and fro, examining in increasingly frightful countenance the bizarre shiftings of the angles of the cell, the ground becoming unlevel beneath his feet, the contours of the room distorting and becoming a living, breathing thing. He stared with increasing discomfiture as the infrastructure manipulated itself, levels of preponderance becoming obscene - changing themselves, regularly and irregularly, driving the mind of the commander towards madness.

The commandant laughed uproariously, hands upon hips, and as she laughed the room began to shake disturbingly, the atmosphere within heating, warping, churning.

She walked with clipped gait toward a table in front of the grisly skull-bearing plinths and rapped her nightstick loudly upon the paneled surface set upon

metal frame, eyes bulging alarmingly as she bade the commander to come near to her.

He approached, slowly but in an unquestioning obedience, his teeth bared and jaws set against one another in a brutal clench, spittle dribbling down from his mouth and laced with telltale flecks of blood, the veins of his thickly muscled arms pulsing in an obscene vascularity as the biochemical changes within his own body coalesced in an evermore dangerous combination with the atmospheric distortions brought on by the manipulations of the commandant herself.

Once near to her the commander felt the grasp of the commandant's hand upon the nape of his neck - completely dominant, controlling, possessing. She loomed down at him, he a formidable figure by anyone's reckoning but even still she herself stood more than a head taller, unnatural - a giantess both in stature and constitution and all the more so in the unbridled evil of her appetites and foul proclivities. The commander looked up, trembling as he gazed into her face - painfully fine-featured, regal, set upon skin alabaster white glowing with perspiration - haughty, imperious and undeniably cruel.

With her other hand she slid the nightstick across the commander's midsection then rubbed it downward, tracing with its point across where his pubis and hips met, smiling in a sick, incestuous and matronly fashion as she noticed his almost instant arousal becoming apparent beneath the covering of his uniform breeches, then laughing as she heard what sounded like the softest of whimpers emanate from betwixt his clenched teeth.

"There, there..." she cooed, bringing her face down and close to his head, darting a long, snake-like tongue playfully and ever so briefly to his ear, whispering sweet yet sadistic promises as she increased the pressure of the nightstick rubbing against his groin before drawing it away and sliding it across the edge of the table, drawing the attention of the commander thusly.

"Don't you remember, my pet, my darling?" said the commandant, meeting the commander's eyes with her own in a fixed look both superficial and perverse - though highly effective - before gazing down toward the surface of the table, the commander doing so also.

Upon the table were laid several faces, flat upon the surface of the federal ware upon the viscosity which they sickly exuded - some fluid beginning to pool near the center of the desk, some seeking, in grotesque, watery currents, the extremities. The commander began to rub his hands together and erupt with a mania-induced laughter as the commandant rocked her head back upon its shoulders, her eyes closed, her closed lips curling in a smile of great and unabashed satisfaction. Each of the faces matched one of the glistening skulls upon the plinth - their skin having been removed with great albeit brutal precision with the razor-sharp knives of special command operatives.

"Your pelts!" the commandant vibrated, gazing with pleasure at the commander amidst his newfound mirth.

"My pelts!" the commander emphasized to himself audibly, smacking his hands down upon either side of the table and screaming in pleasant remembrance of the commandant, himself and their shared pastimes in the

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desert earlier that day. As his roars began to dissipate all of a sudden they became silent as the commandant pressed one, long finger upon his crown - her eyes locked in concentration of methods most occult - and then, he began to recall.

The humvees had roared through the desert and amongst the vanguard the commander and the commandant had shared the front cockpit of one of the most deadly - she driving, he manning shotgun - the black snout of his automatic rifle extended beyond the passenger side window scanning the landscape with lethal intent.

Hot, hallucinatory winds bellowing gusts of dust-carrying surface clouds churned amidst the forward procession of the military vehicles, merciless sand dunes in miles upon miles in either direction and a malignant, infernal sun suspended above withering all life beneath it - a poisonous atmosphere suitable for both terror, counter-terror and that which lies beyond both - that state-wielded, pernicious and ever-expanding commingling which more often than not stemmed from the latter - the frenzied, crystal eye within the wilderness of mirrors.

Both the commander and the commandant had been fully masked during the travel to the staging area and beyond - the execution of the operation itself. Still, as they had driven through the dunes, they exchanged glances despite their concealment as it was, covered beneath masks and goggles, but which they could still feel on base levels beyond mere physical sight alone - the

revelry, the exultation, the lust of death and the lust of the flesh.

As ever this - amidst other things - was a game for them, they both having mapped out the installation to which they would soon arrive in exact replica form only weeks prior at the point, watching the sudden explosives burst where they knew with grisly satisfaction that human bodies would be present in the action proper - the mists of blood which drew them, the suddenly and rapturously exposed internal organs of human flesh which excited them and gave their employment meaning, depth and dimension.

The infrastructure housing their targets was a dismal one but not out of the ordinary in the region - a smattering of low-lying sand-blasted structures of indeterminable age - seemingly unpopulated according to outside vision except a few starved goats and their kids, as well as around half a dozen children of the human variety, halting in their play as they heard the armored vehicles roar into the vicinity.

The humvees separated - engines running hot, leaping over the small dunes - surrounding the area in a pincher motion or circling of the wagons as some of the midwesterners amidst the select contingent enjoyed phrasing the method in their soft drawl. The special operators from the military detachments were the first to exit their vehicles, faces concealed, muscled bodies covered in gear and weapons locked, loaded and at the ready as they surrounded the buildings in movements indicative of their high precision training.

All was quiet from inside the buildings and on the

exterior the sound of the special forces operatives on the ground was near silent as their marauder boots shuffled through the sands with lethal intent, each step closer heralding the impending doom of the inhabitants. Over the rumble of the idling humvees the commandant could hear the bleating of the goats and drifting lazily on hot wind the soft sobs of the children who knew that the game was now up. The futuristic armed figures now approaching, their fractal camouflage uniforms and the supercharged automotive behemoths bearing down on their home - this meant Americans, and Americans meant death.

From the cockpit of her and the commander's shared carrier the commandant spied in the distance a door slowly opening, a black figure in relief behind the door and the door opening wider revealing a mother completely clad from head to toe in a burqa the color of midnight obscuring her identity and features, an infant in swaddling cradled in the crook of one arm. With her other she gestured toward an area beneath clothes lines where one of the children stood alone, a small boy clothed in white garments, small vest and cap.

Through his wet tears the boy saw his mother and her motioning for him to come and he began to run toward the safety of waiting arms.

Beneath her black mask the commandant smiled and raised a finger toward the scene in a certain fashion, a protocol signal denoting a certain action from the watching commander.

With compliance most willing the commander responded, bringing half his body out from the

passenger side window, resting the waist of one side upon the ledge, body ultra-tensed in termination mode as he brought his huge machine gun around in a dramatic, sweeping motion - target in sight.

A blast of fire erupted from the muzzle, resultant from which was for the commander an economical but very effective burst, and the running child was instantly terminated - the body flung sideways, hands flung forward upon the ground in seeming supplication in the direction of his mother, head and upper body almost entirely destroyed by dint of the high-caliber hollow point ammunition, exiting blood in furious volume and force snaking angrily across pieces of ruptured brain matter and fractured skull onto the hot desert ground beneath.

The commander pivoted again, training his sights on the mother cradling her younger, infant child, and fired even as the scream of alarm and horror began to erupt from deep within her lungs. The body of the infant disappeared in a mist of blood and curling smoke as the lead of the bullets punched through its fragile frame and into the chest of the mother who crumpled to the ground as the sounds of male voices, shouting in Farsi from inside the building, resounded in alarm.

Combat soldiers entered from all sides - bashing through ancillary doors in droves, smashing through windows and leaping through them, landing upon the packed-dirt floors in tactical crouches, arms drawn. A line of black ops personnel poured into the building from either side of the entrance opened by the mother, their marauders

treading heedlessly with casual blasphemy across the corpse of the mother and baby.

In the initiating humvee the commandant curled her gloved hands together in glee in observation of the same, throwing her head back and erupting in a guttural cackle most unsound as the soldiers continued with their grim tasks.

Those who reached for weapons inside the building were terminated cursorily - the rest marched outside under the watchful eye of a thin man in nondescript khakis and cigarette ash stained member's only jacket, hidden adjutant to the local chief of station - head spook on the ground. With brief gestures from this individual, who was in truth the real COS - the recognized station chief, a cut-out only, the men and women who exited the building were segregated into three groups. One portion was taken away for questioning, to be driven back to the black site on the back of a personnel carrier, bound, blacked-out and sensory deprived for their journey to the Americans' clandestine hell. The majority of the group were bound with zip-ties and ushered back into the building. The latter few were trussed up similarly to the first group and piled into the back of a truck to accompany the vehicle manned by the commander and commandant into the deep desert.

All in place and everyone in their respective places, area and inhabiting identities meticulously checked over by the various clandestine services and technical personnel on site in a matter of minutes, the vehicles roared off almost as suddenly as they had arrived, departing in semi-circular motion with utmost speed out

from the area of operation - two amongst them veering into the seemingly endless desert wilderness, the rest speeding along their pre-assigned routes back to the hangar.

As the commandant drove into the desert, engine pistons grinding ferociously against the tension of the shifting and unstable ground, she saw in a blinding flash in the rear-view mirror the red and orange burst of the compound being incinerated behind them - the expert work of a remotely controlled predator drone equipped with a payload most destructive, its pilot a nondescript young man barely out of his twenties situated thousands of miles away in a darkened chamber within a nondescript building set amongst Virginian pines where only a few blocks away the thrum of suburban life went on apace, unknowing and almost entirely uninquisitive about what went on at the unassuming DOD base spliced amongst the research and business facilities neighboring the quaint if utilitarian neighborhoods of northern Virginia.

There in the humvee the commander and commandant both breathed deeply, inhaling the fumes of burning infrastructure and, indeed, burning bodies, as it wafted in blackened clouds across the landscape. Beneath his concealment the commander smiled to himself, for he imagined that in addition to the olfactory odors of the newly established smashan that he could also smell the fear of the tribal militants in the surrounding area, their fear, their rage - as they viewed the black smoke of yet another sacrificial fire burning for

the propitiation of the Great Satan.

Behind them some several hundred yards back the other humvee sped along the designated path following the commandant, the COS seated in the passenger side of the vehicle driven by a blank-faced SOCOM soldier, a technical operations officer occupying the back seat, smirking to himself as he optimized various gadgets contained in a hardshell briefcase open on his lap. The technical officer was pleased about his assignment, in his own strange way, more pleased about the implicit greenlights on-the-ground operation against another decidedly hard target that would be added to his personnel file. The SOCOM soldier just wanted to get the job over and done with - get a meal back at base and settle down with a bottle of liquor and thoughts of his girl back in Suffolk. He scanned the horizon beyond the forward vehicle and in the distance saw the incongruous tetrahedral shape of thick posts bearing human skulls atop them and beneath that black, ripped fabric flapping madly in the blistering winds. Arrival.

CHAPTER 28

On the floor of the bunker Sadie stretched disturbingly, her frame seeming to wrench itself several inches off the ground as if the gravity had been ripped away from her body, quarter of a finger still inserted slipping out from its sodomy, eyes caked with mucus straining to open. Her consciousness divided, subdivided then divided and subdivided again - seemingly shattered beyond the pale of all known insanity yet strangely functional still - albeit bizarrely so - as she stretched her mind through myriad form across space, time and dimension. Briefly her eyes opened there to the darkness of the bunker and briefly she saw there in the soot-covered underground space, amidst the greenish hue of the airborne chemical hallucinogens hanging perniciously in the stale air, several black-robed forms in the periphery of her vision - shadowy bodies pulsing with intrigue, violence, conspiracy - cult recruiters. She began to gasp as her fractured consciousness sought control over her body once more, a control that was not to be found.

With an otherworldly movement two of the shadows separated from their murder - appearing to float above the surface of the floor toward her. A long, corpse-pale finger moved from within one of the cloaks, depressing upon Sadie's forehead and in so doing causing a freezing

coldness to permeate the young girl from temple to feet. A mechanical, equally freezing in effect and entirely unnatural voice emanated from the anonymous blackness of the cowled form hanging over her, commanding her to submerge once again. Helpless to resist, she could only but obey, her body losing its former rigidity and sliding against the cold concrete, finger once again seeking her path of sodom and penetrating, burst blood vessels upon Sadie's face flaring angrily once again in reaction to the programming signal - sharp inhalation of breath and then a slow, languorous exhale.

When her eyes opened once more it was through the dim ultraviolet gaze of her father's herald that she saw and she was once again there in the black site, mind soaking in the newfound revelations of her parentage.

Among the sector back at the bunker one of the cult recruiters watched Sadie's prone form intensely, observing for any sign of irregularity, for any possibility that the girl might again regain something akin to waking consciousness in the immediate. Once assured of the stationary nature of their target the cult recruiters facilitated the first stage of her rendition, swaddling her body in a ream of the same sort of black cloth from which their robes were hewn and carrying her, lifting her shrouded form upward toward the opening of the hatch, body then grasped by the waiting black leather-gloved hands of the internal security assigned to their contingent.

The body was conveyed up the hillside to the awaiting vans, the head cult recruiters watching imperiously as the moving dark figures that were the

internal security personnel held their fleshly sacrifice aloft towards the wizened, bleak and horrific high-tier matriarchs of the commandant's cult awaiting. Beneath black cowls thin lips, stretched and cruel, spasmed in premeditation of their charge. Full, sensuous lips slurped in horrible lust of hematophagic urges, imagining the concourse of veins visible beneath what was almost assuredly thin flesh, pale and sweet, its nectar along its black veined circuitous course most dramatically apparent - full of potential for interspecial feeding amidst the cloud.

Although the body was limp, the possessing consciousness back at the black site was very much alive and as Sadie stared in her placental mammalian form inversely through the iron bars into her father's eyes, in so doing she was now with them, the commander and the commandant, in the desert, amidst the tetrahedral skull-bearing place - a portal to a transdimensional hell.

The hooded bodies were flung out of the back of their prison carrier, marched at triple time toward the center of the stakes, beneath the stark shadows of the black flags and the skull-mounted poles, a dramatic silhouette cast upon the infernal heat of the desert with little else for miles upon miles - the nearest residence being incinerated by the predator drone less than an hour before.

This was a place that was avoided by all domestic persons who traversed the land as well as travelers from neighboring countries and had been avoided for hundreds of years by both demographics.

For it was a place of rot - a place that the evil forces manifested in a most dramatic fashion and, being roused, would pierce the veil of night and not only bring catastrophe and ruin down upon the individual, but upon the entirety of the collective as well. As such it had been co-opted by the Americans, those masters of blasphemy, amidst sardonic smiles by case officers in expensive outdoors wear - but yet altogether further co-opted by the commandant and the commander in their own satanic obsession.

As the commander exited the vehicle as the detainees were being marched forward, he closed his eyes against the blinding yellowish glare of the desert sun, ever so briefly, as the tread of his boots sunk into the sand. There he saw the entities that had been communing with him since time immemorial, body after body, life after life. The face, male, growling in indescribable rage, possessing an inhuman hatred - eyes clenched and mouth and hairs smeared with a blood most crimson - the blood of atrocities transcending galaxies - he melded and his eyes opened once again to the brightness - possessed.

Beyond, the commander saw the commandant, having already outpaced him considerably during the brief interim of his reverie.

She, stalking forward through the sands toward the center of the staging area where the detainees now waited, their sensory deprivation devices and restraints still intact, though all involved could ascertain instinctively that they, even so bound, could feel that something was entirely amiss.

Beneath her mask the commandant smiled, for she knew that the rumors had begin to spread - and rightfully so - among the militants - rumors of certain Americans who were, according to regional opinion, decidedly more unsound in their methods than the others.

A precedent had been set that in all truth it would be more merciful - the preferred option - to die amidst the incendiary shrapnel-bearing fire of the unmanned predator drones - or even to be brought to the black site for an indeterminable length of hell and uncertainty - than to be taken along that long, wayward path through the desert.

Now they were all there - the commander, the commandant, and their servitors - the latter few in number but horrific one and all in countenance, consisting of a veritable cross-section of the blackest intents amidst foreign incursion - a veritable pantheon of predators.

Opposite them those who had, unbeknownst on some level in doing so, insofar as the consequences were concerned, called them - there now, shivering despite the infernal desert heat - the morsels that had fallen from the master's table to be consumed by the more rabid among the household of the Great Satan, those most rabid and least human amongst them.

As the commandant examined the preparations of the detainees by the other members of their retinue, professionally in an oversight capacity - the SOCOM driver doing double-duty as guard, the COS whispering indeterminable words with poisonous tongue to one of

the detainees as the technical services officer began arranging a tripod with camera and other devices some yards away - the commander stood, attention diverted from the detainee preparation, the soon-to-be bloodied bodies. These were only trifles, he knew, the bloody meat - the bait - repositories of that red elixir which would soon shimmer against the backdrop of the deep desert not dissimilar to the crimson blood of the wounded in oceanic environs floating in hallucinogenic fashion, drawing the shark to feast.

Storms were brewing in the desert, the commander ascertained. Deep, horrible churnings were afoot on the far dunes - omens brought on the backs of violent winds, the signal of demonic arrival. Through possessed eyes, himself demonized, he stared into the vast emptiness of the deep desert and through her horrific prism Sadie stared down at him, possessing him, even as the bat hanging in surveillance, in inverse vision, stared at the disturbed, swaying figure of the commander after, in her present, there in the cell as he recalled under the horrible and sorcerous touch of the commandant.

Evil, chaos and calamity had arrived - doom for the detainees and a whispering upon the storm winds of a great and all-encompassing doom to come for the earth itself. There upon the far-flung altar amidst the far wilderness, on sour ground stained and polluted with the blood of human sacrifices and propitiations most black since time immemorial - at that time - the first mechanism of the chain of terror was activated in a global situation that had reached critical mass. A black spell of destruction, a terminal prophecy.

Within insane vision as Sadie looked through the eyes of the commander, she herself her father, upon the horizon there in the desert - there was the commandant, the ultimate astral death mother, framed against a sky reddish with the horror of the earth's own premeditation of a death most mutilatory and severe. Already her viper-like hand had snaked down toward the now naked bodies of one of the detainees - garments cut away yet hoods and steel and leather restraints of divers designs securely attached - immobilizing, paralyzing.

CHAPTER 29

When the wind whipped across the great careening dune-laden expanse of the desert causing giant sandstorms to pummel and warp the desolate landscape, there within those most violent winds myriad hordes of unclean spirits of divers design resident to the area were carried forth - hellions drawn howling in their despair toward the promise of that which was most vile in constitution and altogether fell in intent.

As the haboob reached that place of horror and sacrifice in the deep desert the amassed clouds would begin to churn inwards in a counter-clockwise fashion, circling the point where the commander and commandant stood with the detainees under their charge - extraordinarily rendered for a termination that they could neither conceive of nor fathom.

The staging area became the centrifuge of the whirlwind which carried with it all manner of evil, desolation, darkness and sorrow - the eye of the storm and its very causation. Through her crystalline vision, Sadie watched.

As the commandant thrust her hand down toward the chest of the chosen detainee, the inaugural sacrifice and first to receive her touch, it passed through skin and muscle seemingly without effort but with a sickening

sound that caused the COS to involuntarily shiver despite the fact that he had seen it done so many, many times before.

Words from an ancient book written by those who in historicity and contemporaneously were the sworn enemies of the tribal people and their allies whispered through the mind of the COS as he witnessed the bloodshed, an unfolding nightmare to which he was not only an observer but a collusive partner in whole, if not in direction:

For the morning is to them even as the shadow of death;
If one know them,
they are in the terrors of the shadow of death.
He is swift as the waters;
Their portion is cursed upon the earth...

Those back at the black site, the guards who stalked beneath the glittering concertina wire periphery of the base saw then in the distance a smoke from the north, a herald of coming devastation.

Penetrating fully into the chest cavity and then withdrawing, the commandant held aloft the victim's heart, still beating its final electrical spurts of blood not into the veins of its erstwhile host but rather down upon the black and shining gloves of his executioner, adorning her arms in a slick and grisly display, increasing her luster.

The technical officer hunkered down behind his tripod recording eagerly - intermittently moving his apparatus in order to provide different vantage points

and visual perspectives, needful for later when he spliced the footage together for the purposes that the subsector of the organization to which he was attached so dictated.

As the first detainee, completely immobile through the entire process of being harvested by dint of his restraints, fell backwards, with a dull thud upon the sand, the commander moved in - a huge survival knife, serrated on the back and gleaming with a razor edge upon the other recently unsheathed from the holster upon his left hip.

Removing the transport hood briskly and with grim precision yet manic in his execution, the commander severed the head from the body, swatting away the technical officer if he deigned move too close and extending the dismembered crown to the SOCOM soldier who received it carefully, conveying it from the central part of the staging area to the commander and commandant's shared personal carrier then retracing his steps back for the cullings that followed until the cycle of elimination was once again complete.

The COS lit a cigarette and continued to contemplatively view the unfolding scene before him as the churning sandstorm turned in a slow, counterclockwise fashion around the hill upon which he and his team were perched. They had impugned upon the land in furtherance of their own dread purposes and agendas and the land itself now impugned upon them, those select few especially, in a malignancy altogether deeper and more profound than that of the relative newcomers. As such, in keeping apace - both forces -

both dark - had without word but clear in action settled into a pact of horrific mutual reciprocation, the clauses of which were met by each falling body, each line of transgression of the so-called rules of war surpassed manically and torn forever asunder. Though this place, now the zenith capstone of the actions by both sides was still, to a rule, clandestine, that which had and was being fomented in secret would in time stretch the limits of its microcosm and blossom forth into a nuclear horror to which all the world would be witness.

CHAPTER 30

After a time the staging area upon the hill situated in the shadow of the tetrahedral stakes looming above and bearing the skulls of human sacrifices from times before descended into total chaos.

Through continued crystal vision Sadie directed her father, pouncing upon corpse upon readied corpse again and again after the commandant's ministrations were through - she the death goddess upon the heights, facilitating and tasting the first fruits of the bloodshed - he the foul bird of carrion which came after, animated by the shivering form of the bat inhabiting a space hours into the future after whom, in turn, situated herself decades further within a far and clandestine wilderness.

As the hearts of the slain were held aloft by the commandant in the harsh desert, the stomping grounds of the Great Satan, decades later the cult recruiters held aloft the body of Sadie herself - enveloped and enraptured in trance, stiff as a corpse who then, there, directed the machinations of the ultimate leader of the organization - the burgeoning despot in his years formative and developmental.

The storm bore down closer and closer upon all sides and the technical services officer - continuation of his assignment at this point being futile - covered his mouth

with one sleeve while picking up his photographic apparatus with the other, retreating back toward the humvee and the safety of its interior.

In close distance orange bursts issued from the pistol of the commandant now withdrawn, obscured by clouds of sand and debris - her most clandestine machinations invisible and hidden to the rest of the company amidst the confusion as the winds and the demons inhabiting within which now pressed down upon them all.

Back at the black site the commandant removed the finger which had been pressed upon the forehead of the commander and the vision faded - the scenes from several hours prior dissipating as the interior of the cell came into full focus once again for the commander and Sadie both, one in the same only moments before but now separated as the watcher and the watched, the seen and seeing, as the bat hanging inverted once again opened its eyes and fluttered its leathern wings about its small body and the commander viewed the interior of the cell - the memories of the recent foray into the desert now so very fresh and present within his mind's eye.

The commandant smiled her sadistic smile as the commander came to in full - he rubbing his hands over his arms in brisk motion to hasten reorientation to his flesh as it was now, situated in the present. She had ceased the recall at a strategic and pivotal point, for had she gone further he would have - the intrusion of the possessing agent assisting in leveraging the result - been privy to the details of her own activities there upon the hillside during those final moments, activities which she

had concealed then and there during the bedlam and which would now be concealed in full and in permanence, according to her estimation and desire.

Night had descended into its darkest and most inauspicious juncture outside the black site and within, in the cell on that furthest of corridors where the activities of the commander and commandant went on unseen, excepting for the surveillance of their daughter, the night grew darker still as the mania of the commander reached horrific proportions as the commandant manipulated and directed the currents which he bore forth, creating a symphony most dread and terrible - the effects of which would reverberate far - piercing through the firestorm of the twenty megaton bombs, pressing through the genocidal veil of the coming apocalypse and enduring throughout the bleak nuclear winter and then only seeding the bleak future in a fashion altogether stark and unnatural.

The moment of conception had arrived and the commandant augured the moment expertly as she pinioned the nightstick within her hand upon the small of the commander's back - forcing his body down, bent at the waist, so that his face pressed down within inches of the grisly death masks of the recently murdered which rested upon the table - the bloodied skulls upon the plinths beyond staring and watching in terminal insanity - the former terror-obsessed spirits which had inhabited them now spectral entities suffused with an even greater terror and intelligence, but still seeking the succor of their former fleshly shells. The position to which she willed the commander to enact now assumed, the

commandant withdrew the nightstick and with her free hand swept up a quantity of the congealing liquid which pooled upon the table, consisting of blood and subcutaneous fat, moistening and lubricating the length of the instrument for imminent penetration.

The commander groaned in dark pleasure and premeditation as the commandant unbuckled and yanked the trousers of his battle duty uniform downward, massaging the nightstick inward with expert motion into his entrails with a slick forward motion, sodomizing him in long, firm strokes and watching as his sexual member grew commensurately.

Upon her vantage point on the pipe opposite the cell, her vision inverse and filtered through the bars upon the heavy metal door, Sadie thrilled at the scene before her - the bared posterior of her father and the sneer of mother commandant as the totalitarian matriarch of her line went about her business long predestined - her intentions, her agendas realized - with stern disposition and even more stern in her delivery. With an ultrasonic scream Sadie detached from her perch and flew with blind abandon toward the bar grates, squeezing her body through and then circling, careening wildly as her small mammalian body was vomited forth from betwixt the pressure of the bars then landing, leathern wings shivering and outstretched, on the table upon which the commander now straddled in obscenity.

In that moment the commandant recognized that the moment had come - the moment which would facilitate a continuation of her own reign of terror long after the buttons had been pushed on either side in facilitation of

the coming conflagration. The eyes of the nocturnal creature now upon the surface parallel with the eyes of the commander looked into his and he into hers and once more the will of Sadie intruded upon that of her father - their consciousness becoming one, his fingers splaying in rapture and trance in the knowledge that the possession which he now inhabited and which she now controlled was his natural state. He became the daughter as the daughter became the father and as both felt the sensory overload of the commandant's anal rape come to the forefront - their heads bowed in a blasphemous submission to coming nuclear death - consummation.

"Eat, husband!" hissed the commandant, her eyes looking directly into those of the bat - addressing the source consciousness. With one hand still manipulating the now sickeningly slick length of the nightstick within his guts, with her other - a thin, cruel black-gloved depression upon his back - the commandant goaded the commander to partake of the grisly feast laid before them.

Stretching further her membranous, vascular wings for balance, Sadie dipped her snout into the tender blood and tissue, the lust for blood and the sealing of her blasphemous, incestuous pact overwhelming and subsuming all other facets of her trisected consciousness.

Wailing erupted beyond the black site, in the medieval stone huts of the indigenous desert dwellers, the ululations of the elderly blind matriarchs of a sect soon to disappear from the face of the earth, heralding in precognitive awareness the advent of the mother of the

great beast.

As the commandant removed the hand previously resting upon the commander's back and moved it, reaching around so that the her black-gloved fingers encircled and grasped his pulsing member, Sadie began to shiver almost uncontrollably, feeling the coming on of orgasm even as she buried her fang-laden mouth further still into the human meat and fluids.

A final stroke as the nightstick moved now entirely briskly with little resistance hitting homeward in its last and most intrusive penetration and the issue of the commandant exited forcefully from his hardened, vein-laden and uncircumcised member - anointing the bloodied, butchered faces and the wings of his daughter alike and reaching the base of the reddened skulls beyond who grinned in their obscene, preternatural awareness. His thickly muscled body spasmed across tightly wound slabs of muscle, the insemination animating dead flesh and live alike, not relaxing but rather intensifying the feeling of overwhelming hellish pressure which wracked throughout his core. Using the nightstick still embedded within him like a lever the commandant forced him further downward, her lips peeled back in a maniacal concentration as his hips jutted out further as a result of the internal manipulation, forcing his open and slavering lips to feed fully on the flesh and the seminal fluid of life and the ghastly fluids of death which now freely commingled.

Within her womb the feeling of life surfaced - the seed of living death, electrically charged and growing instantaneously as she watched with elation the blood

feast in its incessant continuation - those consuming and those yet to be born unified in oneness. She slipped the nightstick out from betwixt the posterior of the commander, he now heedless of the action in the raptures of his ecstatic bloodlust, allowing the grotesque instrument of repression to clatter to the floor. Her dominant hand now free, she lifted it to her midsection, low and close to her sex and felt that which now dwelt within. She looked down and smiled, her conception realized, and then looked forward - beyond the grisly aftermath - beyond the wet, reddened skulls upon the plinth - a thousand yard stare gazing far beyond into the future abyss of oncoming apocalypse and then, gently, sickeningly, whispering the name of her progeny simultaneously present and yet to arrive - Sadie.

CHAPTER 31

As Sadie experienced the moment of her conception, herself her own sire and as witness to the act, on the rising hill outside the bunker her form swaddled in black was conveyed beyond the crest - beyond the livid faces of the hungry cult recruiters and into the hands of those who would be her direct handlers and whom for them she would be their entrusted charge - high-tier, maximum security and express priority - the latter indicated by the fact that the black vans were already running in premeditation of her arrival, engines turning over in angry mechanical report as they imbibed their fuel-rich sustenance, yearning sickly for the rutted highways and byways of hell on earth, the backroads and off-roads through towering deep forests of dead and poisoned trees, sentinels of the commandant's progress.

The inside of the black van upon which she was carried was stark, if meticulous in its interior for its mission and especially – mission inclusive - for two of the persons who had been scheduled for and would shortly now be conveyed - one already inhabiting one of the further forward bench seats, one leveraged into the back through dual black metal doors now thrown open and laid against one side of the cargo hold, head facing the metal interior and feet resting against the wheel well.

Her body still encircled in the tough black cloth which had been wrapped around her for her initial extraction, the black form was further secured with hauling chains that pinned her body against the interior side of the vehicle - as much for practical consideration for the rough roads ahead than any sort of punitive intention - for punishment in great and copious amounts would be hers in more than ample measure once arrived at her destination.

As the vehicle lurched forward the charred remains of the fiat commandant, whose corpse had long since ceased smoldering on the flat plane beneath the hills outside of the entrance of the hatch, remained - ghostly and still underneath the night sky - the only evidence of the cult recruiters incursion into the area.

On a hill parallel and opposite to where the van began its procession in its long southeastern bound trek, the necessary components housed in the barn-like structure which sat upon it were removed, packed carefully in other vehicles for a similar eastbound journey - the outpost having served its purpose for now.

The technician who had manned those instruments during long exile while her daughter sat in the dark bunker beneath the earth, worshiping the visage of her mother then, unbeknownst to her, now sat on one of the forward facing seats in the very van where her daughter was now being conveyed - dressed in the robes of a common cult recruiter, though of a higher tier by dint of the ampleness of the cowl which hid her - the commandant.

CHAPTER 32

Sadie began to writhe within her bonds as the astral travel which she still inhabited became distorted - her hallucinatory voyage shattering in strange ways in uniform time with the distance that began to stretch beyond her and beyond her awareness - separating her from the homefront, as it were, the only she had ever known - giving way to wilderness and wilderness most foul.

Her writhing was noticed but unattended to by her handlers - the cult recruiters allowing every ounce of the green poison gas which had assailed her in the closed subterranean space which had constituted her previous domicile of habitation to work its due course - waste not, want not - for the hundreds of miles to the engineering center would be long indeed and it was beholden upon them, the cult recruiters themselves, to make due with provisions in scarcity - even with such a high-tier captive in tow.

Sadie's visions began to deteriorate near to the time that the black van began to make its horrid trek forward into the distant night - almost as if the region of her access then, there, had facilitated the oneness - the facility of action which both allowed and gave access to the far, dark past - giving liberty towards her

involvement in and manipulation of the same.

Upon the far side of one forward bench seat within the van her mother smiled, a thin line of blood dripping from the corner of her closed lips as she considered the nuclear missile silos there in the region in which she had so long worked - those especially which had not yet been deployed and still lay waiting, pursed and pulsing for release - holocausts upon horrific holocausts still to come, awaiting her own motion - her will the deciding factor.

As diseased, cold sweat dripped across and soon sheathed the near-naked body of Sadie beneath her covering, the one and only true daughter of the commandant, Sadie's perceptions grew as shifting and as labyrinthine as the concourse of the poisonous narcotics which pulsed still throughout her body, as convoluted and wayward as the strange route the procession of internal security and cult recruiters had now embarked - the former not nearly as insidious and ill in effect as the expansion which the astral legions had effected within her both in body and conscience.

She had seen herself born, born as a despot beyond all reason - surpassing the utmost levels of transgression even by sole dint of existence, by blood heritage alone, transgressing further in intent any and all others - an abomination of the most severe level and of the most catastrophic capabilities - awaiting deployment. That deployment had not come - not yet - perhaps not ever, in the flesh which now encompassed her - as her physical form wrenched itself painfully within the bondage in

which it found itself within the confines of the black van of the cult recruiters.

Imbued with powers beyond their own, Sadie stretched her disturbed consciousness further forward - feeling the wetness of the greenish surf splash upon her body - the body of the bat - as it held fast to the curving flotation surfaces of the pontoon as it sluiced toward a partially hidden inlet in the dead of night. Waters brackish but not foreign - her fanged mouth curled in pleasure at the realization - back at the point, at long last. The face of her mother turned back at her in that time and place, even as the cowled head of the commandant in the dark corners of the organizational vehicle turned and viewed the anonymous black shape in which her daughter was now inhabiting and concealed, the heavy hauling chains grating and rattling against the metal floorboard of the vehicle as it continued on the return route of its black pilgrimage - rises crested and valleys traveled in the concourse of its forward motion.

She could see the twisting shoreline of the point as they made their way forward - the commandant eying her knowingly - the other members of the crew personnel of a force now long since disappeared - though mother commandant remained as perhaps the unintended nadir of their collective efforts at home and abroad. There was the land, her land, rapidly approaching - situated barely at sea level - coming closer and closer by dint of the roaring of the outboard motor which navigated Sadie, mother commandant and the crew closer to what in effect, she felt, was her genuine origin - the point - the source of the horror that would

soon expand and mushroom outward to such a degree that none would be beyond its reach.

As the boat neared the shore and acknowledgment of its approach was indicated by sign and countersign of land crew and crew afloat respectively Sadie found her sight begin to dim - the rocking of the waves becoming disturbing, nauseating, the control which she possessed over the bat slipping irrevocably away as the nocturnal landscape of the point began to melt before her very eyes.

Mother commandant turned one last time and her gaze upon her daughter - intruding psychonaut, in a time and place where she should not be, accessed via interdimensional interstices which nature itself dictated and forbade to pierce - was undisguised in its hostility - an omen of things to come.

The motorcade departing the area of the hatch was now several hours into its journey though only fifty miles or so from the area which they had left which even still put them squarely within the lifeless hinterlands between the hatch and the furthermost borders of organizational territory. It was there, in those climes, that the cult recruiters noticed the soft sounds of choking coming from beneath the blackout cover and hauling chains - the indicators of the onset of asphyxiation.

The cult recruiter closest to the captive hissed a warning to the others and through the rear window flashed a crimson light thrice into the night - neither to stop nor idle, but to press forward, the sign indicating that their head would join and overtake them shortly.

As the rest of the vans and the few light carriers manned by armed internal security personnel moved on, the lead van left the formation - pulling onto a small rocky outcropping, a cliffside marking the end of the plateau beyond which stretched the vast midwestern expanse - the fields which had once been farmed to feed a nation now a wasteland.

Sadie's hands rested at her side, one trembling dominant finger curled and covered in filth from her lengthily executed auto-erotic sodomy, withdrawn with the melting of her internal vision. As her finger curled and twitched with the arrhythmic, irregular pulse of her circulatory system, caked and glistening with brown and yellow scum, far above them the fingernail moon hung limply in the sky, casting the wasteland in a pale, diseased luminescence.

No life moved on the plains as the commandant stretched her consciousness forth to the east - the horrors of the engineering center awaiting and then beyond that the commander's headquarters and her vast, secret network of dungeons which lay beneath. As the cult recruiters went about the business of temporarily disentangling Sadie from her bondage, stirring but not yet awake, the commandant availed herself of the view and the expansion of consciousness which it afforded her - a look into a bleak future and an assessment of the horror of the earth as it was now which was, in truth, her doing in principal.

Within the confines of the van - the dual back doors now open to afford what little light the nocturnal sky

produced under the lunar waning, yet enhanced by the largesse of the sky which bore down above them - the cult recruiters rolled Sadie from the encasement of black cloth which she had inhabited since her rendition from the hatch after detaching the stout locks which fastened the thick hauling chains to the wall fixtures in the interior of the vehicle - the latter a pointed and quite specific after-market addition.

The signs of withdrawal from the poisons which she had been subjected to back in the hatch were clearly visible - the evidence of the girl's body attempting to reassert itself to normative operating status more horrific than the unnatural rigors which the involuntary dosing had forced her physicality to endure. The abject predators amongst the number of the commandant's faithful were now well beyond - passengers and operators in the night-cloaked vehicles which churned and struggled down the one rocky pass which led from the plateau to the plains beyond - actionable transgression on their part blocked now more by physical distance than any will to obedience. Succulent young flesh would be theirs in the by and by - to enjoy - and to a terminal degree - once at engineering and most certainly by the time they had descended into the commandant's training center and into the variegated pastimes which awaited them there.

Even now, hundreds of small children lined the outermost perimeter of the commander's headquarters - puffy, tear-streamed faces within inches of the criss-crossed metal fencing which careened upward toward the initial rolls of concertina wire, the bright, shining

metallic coils of which gleamed with intimidation and promise of doom far above them.

Each eye bore the crystalline droplet of tear, each back and hind angrily marked with the lashings of cane, whip and paddle - red flesh of punishment cruelly administered with unbridled abandon contrasting starkly with tender skin most pale - the white racial strains which had been encouraged within the outlying areas - the results of the program now inhabiting their places of judgment, selection and ultimate decision by the dark forces of the organization.

Many of them - most of them - had been well tenderized in the long trek to the commander's headquarters both by biological parents as well as ancillary minders - dealers of child slavery in the outer regions and regions like the immediate forests surrounding the periphery of the commander's headquarters - children within internal exile.

Others were brought by the commandant's cult recruiters - though those from their percentage were but a small number from their overall yield. The choicest amongst them according to the various properties of necessity and proclivities having already been separated and moved into the dormitories of the commandant's training center - some, for residence in the evil subterranean palaces of the dungeons beneath with all which that would entail - some enslaved and purposed toward a quick and terminal end somewhat similarly but far from equally domiciled.

Any of the naked children which dared to withdraw themselves from their state of attention directly before

the perimeter fences - a minute percentage - would find themselves mown down by infernal blasts of fully automatic gunfire from the silenced MP5 or MAC-10 rifles wielded by internal security personnel. Of the latter, some of their number were hidden while some of them were overtly present and both in effect holding each of the children's lives, several per individual internal security member thus surveilling, within a hair-trigger of death - entrapping and enslaving them within a grid of horror and with no escape. There was something special and altogether surreal in seeing a body denuded of all clothing, vulnerable and innocent to the elements, receiving an entire clip of automatic fire hammered into its flesh and at a relatively close range. Internal security were the destroyers and beneath the anonymous bleak lens of goggles, behind the fully concealing black balaclavas, even then and from a distance, tactically decided, they could smell the ambrosia of carnage as the small bodies disappeared into mists of blood which caught and carried upon the wind, their bleeding trunks and mangled body parts laying strewn, further souring blood-soaked ground long since turned foul.

Hundreds of miles beyond, upon the cliffside of the plateau, the commandant focused her hideous will forward - to the commander's headquarters as the scene unfolded within her mind on the grounds of that more easterly clime where dawn had already arrived. Inside the confines of the van the attendant cult recruiters stripped away Sadie's remaining garments - flimsy and

obscenely revealing as they were in their well-worn condition and her state of partial undress - removing the final evidences of her former life, left there to rot on the howling western wastes.

As Sadie was rolled onto her side and her buttocks parted, a long thin finger of one of the more expertly trained cult recruiters amidst their number inserting a resin-coated, bullet shaped suppository into her anus, the commandant manned her post of surveillance - watching and waiting for the coming actions of the commander which were sure to come, as sure as the green tides of the filthy waters of the Perquimans lapped upon the banks of the point.

There on the eastern state situated on a southern coast, the headquarters of the commander being more westward within that particular political formation long since dead but situating a marked coastal station in comparison with the vast interior which lay westward, the dark forces of the organization prepared for a mass culling - not executed for reasons of ill-conceived moral rightness - but for the forward action, lockstep with evil, that the spilling of blood would facilitate - no right or wrong.

Each small hand remaining reached aloft, encircling the metallic wire of the outer perimeter fence and grasping the iron gates beyond which lay inescapable horror, doom and black sadism perpetrated upon black sadism - induced and facilitated by cruel minders whose career it was to avail themselves of reaching toward the limits of torment and transgression - young, predisposed flesh their intended and most available

target. This hell was engineered by the control and the ever-destructive reach of the commandant herself and the commander at her side, his chest criss-crossed with bandoliers of bullets and other death-dealing ordnance, his face concealed and anonymous - ready and waiting for the death toll to sound. None did and none would stand against their overarching hegemony.

Beneath the surface, so many little girls being treated so roughly, young, supple bodies pulled over the waiting laps of the pontifexes of the commandant's training center. Black skirts lifted and knickers pulled down with cursory and well presumed authority before the rain of smacks coursed down upon the bared posteriors of the youngsters whom were the recipients of trauma-induced programming on a day that moved onward to day, day and night before, and thereafter selfsame - a dreadful existence beneath the dark clouds bearing down upon a compound of ultimate penitence.

As much as the cries and screams would echo down the corridors the punishment would not cease there in the commandant's training center - tender flesh once bared in humiliation and shame would be tormented - the smack of open palm by narcotic speed-induced handler giving way to the cracks of wooden paddle upon flesh ever-reddening and in time, subjected to instruments even more cruel in their design and application.

The tears that were spilled in such circumstances were not stains upon the legacy of the commandant but rather part and parcel of the the ever-flowing lubricant of her machines of death - just as the bloom of the

mushroom clouds which had loomed over vast portions of the radiated, vaporized bodies wafting upon the winds, billions upon billions of deaths nurturing and facilitating that most totalitarian of regimes for whom the nuclear death goddess was helm.

Above them, their erstwhile companions - for some of them - awaited an altogether more weighty intersection of destiny as they participated in the encircling of bodies, their own, queued and earmarked for death, hands stretched upward toward the sun and fingers grasping the boundary of an area which they sought not to enter but which forces from within stretched out to touch them, molesting and impinging, giving sign of terminal fate - their futures and souls hanging in the balance - the clandestine organization holding the scales.

Little secrets led to large deceptions and consequences of the same there within the commandant's training center as espionage was allowed to come to full flower within the demographics of those so domiciled and incarcerated there - though the result almost always bore those so participating into the positions of shame which the girls there in the dormitories now found themselves.

Each individual dormitory was ruled over by an individual pontifex who acted as the on-the-ground and localized spymaster - observing, containing and oftentimes agitating the conflict and hierarchical atmosphere of internecine conflict which inevitably led to exposure, punishment and trauma - an endless cycle of terror. This was the hallmark of the commandant's

training center - its raison d'être - and the means by which the organization's most precious resources were cultivated and groomed. Some to become themselves permanent fixtures there in the center, galvanizing and strengthening the institutional fortress of the commandant's authority - others to be unleashed upon and in furtherance of the horror of an already hellish earth as agents of a new apocalypse.

CHAPTER 33

A ragged sigh escaped from betwixt Sadie's slightly parted and severely parched lips as the narcotic within the suppository inaugurated the initial stage of its slow time-release dosing - sufficient enough to keep body and mind together for the remainder of their journey as long as no unforeseen delay met them along the road.

The chemical compound was not identical to the green aerosol deployed and respiratorily ingested that had been the cause of Sadie's undoing, however it possessed several base ingredients also present in the gas along with stabilizers - enough of a stop gap to hold off complete deterioration, at least for a time. Once at engineering Sadie would become someone else's problem, her then erstwhile minders and handlers along with mother commandant herself moving on to the commander's headquarters - the next stage of Sadie's destiny to lie within the secretive confines of the engineering center - the most reclusive and most forbidden zone within all of the known areas of the organizational territory. It was there in the heavily wooded region, marked by hill and holler, ideal for and designed by nature herself for concealment and secret

work that the more hideous portion of Sadie's life would begin.

The cult recruiter who had administered the dose placed her finger, still slick with the rectal filth of her charge, upon Sadie's neck - checking her pulse for steadiness and any irregularities that may be present. Her circulation, while weak, was still far more stable than it had been in the initial stages of withdrawal, indicating that the serum had done its work. Naked and shivering slightly due to the night's chill, several of the cult recruiters worked in concert rewrapping the sensory deprivation blackout fabric about Sadie's body and reattaching the heavy hauling chains to the interior of the van. When Sadie next awoke from her drug-induced slumber she would be at engineering - an insurmountable abyss between her and her former and seemingly simple life with mother commandant.

An era was coming to a close and a new dreadful chapter was beginning, not only for her but for the trajectory of the land itself and those who made their habitation upon the same - a seed soon to be planted, now incipient, a field hitherto unsown except for incestuous touch to be sealed in a pact of blood and flesh with far-reaching consequences for all. Now, within the bondage of the chains and blackout fabric, Sadie drifted into deep slumber - no more astral flight would be hers again on this night nor on any night to come - her time of revelation now over, her period of punishment, reckoning and unfolding destiny yet to come.

On the ridge the commandant snarled as one of the senior sisters approached to inform her that Sadie's state

had been rectified - a black-gloved hand rising in warning that the commandant's meditations were not to be broken. The huddled robed figure disappeared back into the shadows of the night and the eyes of the commandant stared forth in blank horror belying no sound thought - searching out again the husband, her mind and flesh hungry for his grisly pastimes.

There at the commander's headquarters at that very juncture the lights dimmed suddenly and without warning within the commandant's training center causing great screams to erupt amongst all the residents therein - the sign and purpose thereof being well known to them. The den mothers and dormitory pontifexes abandoned their disciplinary ministrations - its intended trauma leading up to this moment - and the various residents now released from their shame, temporarily and for a time, scrambled to pull their underthings hurriedly back over swollen and hot flesh as the den mothers already present and the cult recruiter handlers who had burst into the various dormitories barked out the now redundant information that the awaited-for time had now arrived. Buzzers sounded and large steel doors ground open all throughout the compound as the residents of the commandant's training center began to march through the various tunnels and emerge through varied portals within its infrastructure - eyes gleaming with violence and psychosis - senses primed and ready for what was soon to be revealed to them.

Within confined cells within the torture center annex internal security personnel worked furiously at small consoles - controlling the flow of generator powered

current to be routed and re-routed in order to facilitate what the commander had demanded and which was envisaged by the organization at its highest tiers - their duty to be the stewards and executors of the complex and sophisticated machinations which would allow the nightmarish visions of their ultimate and penultimate authorities to be manifest and realized in the here and now. While the commandant's training center and certain ancillary areas above the most subterranean regions of the dungeons of the commandant herself had been put effectively on half-life for the time being, vast portions of headquarters had been taken off the grid entirely - electrical pulse flowing toward other outermost portions of the compound, commandeered and misdirected for sacrificial purposes to come.

Beyond the horizon the commandant stared as a whirlwind of corpse grey light thrust up into the firmament - the screaming astral souls of hundreds of victims of the mass culling now discorporate. Upon the terrace of one lone tower the commander himself emerged - one brutal arm stretched aloft, fist shaking - his eyes burning and bloodshot, casting their view from behind the black mask of his concealment as the children grasped the perimeter fence as his loyalists depressed the breaker sending terminal electrocution level voltage into the thousands of tons of metal encircling headquarters. Arcs flew and the area surrounding a hundred yards from the fence all along its perimeter in either direction filled with the smell of ozone and burning flesh as some of the victims found themselves glued to the fence by dint of the current, blood beginning to boil and burst

from their veins and orifices while others were thrown backwards - smoking corpses upon the cold earth of the organizational center. Shrieks of fanaticism and fury by the select onlookers on the outside and voiced exultation trebling that of their older counterparts by the cadets of the commandant's training center stationed inside the perimeter mingled with the grotesque sounds of death as the lever was now released and the current ceased - the children still affixed and frozen to the heavy metal barrier crumpling to the ground as the power resumed, normative, throughout the training center and the rest of the compound.

Like the fading of a mirage the corpse light bursting into the sky dissipated as the ghostly specters of the slain children were drawn involuntarily into whatever foul destiny beyond their bodies which the fanatics within the organization had decreed - the minds of the commander and the commandant locking in mutual recognition that the act had been done and that the way had been paved. Sadie embarking upon the hell that awaited her and beyond the waiting arena of the commander's headquarters, the commandant's training center beneath that and the dungeons even further below awaiting the commandant's cruel and sorcerous touch. A sliding side door opened and the commandant entered - a tap upon the small cargo area between front driver and passenger side signaling the move forward. Within less than an hour the executive carrier had met up with the others now upon the plains which stretched east and the caravan continued along its decided route.

CHAPTER 34

Dreamless and unnatural sleep constituted the remainder of Sadie's journey to the engineering center - a last rest, or at the very least as close to some semblance of restfulness than she would experience for a long while - before the inevitable coming dawn with all the indescribable harshness which it would bring.

When she began to awaken only a few hours out from the region of the engineering center itself she was too weak to call out - dehydration and hunger along with the effects of multiple organization narcotics rendering her limp and ineffective as to any possibility of recourse for her situation as she remained bound and immobile in the confines of the van. Sadie could feel the hard ridges of the hauling chains which bound her within the blackness which ensconced her, however she could not ascertain what they were nor where she was in truth - the last she had remembered being the visions of the point and before that through a partial and hazy recalling the ordeal which she had endured in the hatch after the death of the one she believed to be her mother. Despite the clandestine nature of her renditioning she knew instinctively that she was in the hands of the cult recruiters and by the feel of the vehicle lurching beneath her she knew that she was in transit to parts unknown.

The commandant augured correctly her daughter's awakening by dint of intrinsic mental link despite the fact that the rest of the cult recruiters inside her personal carrier did not. All of them - including the internal security personnel and other among their company in the other vehicles - were part of a highly compartmentalized mission - the details of which they knew only but a fraction, and in addition some of the information which had been provided to them prior to their deployment being blatant disinformation in truth, though they knew it not.

The hungry mouths of the blood drinkers amongst their number would in fact not be afforded the opportunity to sup upon the sweet crimson offerings of the young within a few days' time at the commander's headquarters for they would in fact would never reach those borders - some to be murdered by her very hand and others to be taken out simultaneously in an ambush along a passage between engineering and headquarters, the staging of which had been long planned by her via secret transmission via the radio in the barn on the hill to her confederates - her more choice loyalists, those slotted for further survival - at least for a time.

Alone she would proceed on the concourse which led from the organizational territory between engineering and headquarters - an area entirely inclusive of the organization's governance yet treacherous all the same and intentionally so - designed and bred by the plots and machinations of special intelligence for just the sort of deception that her return pilgrimage dictated and demanded.

She would proceed alone - nuclear death personified - the seed which she had sown and that which which was soon to be sown - secret.

CHAPTER 35

Light burst upon Sadie's eyes as the blackout cloth was ripped away - chains dislodged and cruel hands apprehending her - hands unknown to her either in consciousness or unconsciousness - neither mother commandant nor the cult recruiters - hands raising her upwards on a wooded hill overlooking a rolling and equally wooded landscape beyond which lay large buildings and enormous hangars of corrugated steel aged with rust.

Rounded stealth hills surrounded her - another wilderness altogether than the one she had known and populated not by one other alone but rather by a host of individuals for whom a new arrival, an arrival to stay, was an altogether different and almost singular event - an anomaly in a region which was cut off from the rest of the organization by dint of its secretive work and the draconian restrictions placed upon it due to the nature of the clandestine activities that took place there via the auspices of organizational authority extending from its center.

Thin streams of blood dripped in a continuous flow down the back legs of the half-dozen naked children who circled a large concrete-fashioned table upon a small rise immediately before her - the first scene

observed by Sadie and an initial indicator to Sadie of the mood of the place which was laden with dramatic import for her but served for them their own foul and very utilitarian purposes - bizarre as they might seem to one hitherto an outsider in their land, despite the fact that the progressions of the day were far from business as usual.

Bent over at their waists, their arms and legs chained with large shackles bearing links affixed into the surface, the inhuman shrieks of their torment echoed across the landscape as the proctor's men practiced their tradecraft - honing their skills upon innocent and vulnerable flesh.

None of the children present bore the mark of the black widow - no sign of the telltale black betwixt parted thighs - meaning then that in the days to come they would be subjected to even worse abuse - for their presence was tenuous within the organization as it was and within the engineering center specifically - belying an even longer tread forward upon the cragged, wayward and transgressive path of obscene punishment which constituted the fullness of their existences there.

As the crystal arcs of electrical work sparked above them, apparatus of divers designs and fell intention along scaffolding which had been erected there and connected to the nearby treeline, along the dirt and gravel path which led to the main hangar of engineering Sadie walked - handled roughly by an entourage which needed no masking - for the very region in which they existed was their concealment. She was the lone pilgrim walking forth into the unknown, and the deranged faces of the inhabitants of that land - staring at her hungrily

upon either side - spurred her ever forward towards an inextricable fate.

The procession was ritualistic - made all the more so by her nakedness - a glimpse for the immediate observers of the first fruits, yet to be tasted by their sector. Like the lamb that bore the sins of the tribe in times long since past, she was the offering which brought not promise of redemption but rather promise of further horror. A diadem in the crown of engineering still awaiting its cut and polish - a signal to the central organizational apparatus of both their expertise and of the decidedly dark spiritual currents which underlined their habitation, work and demographics in specificity.

Behind her Sadie heard the screams of the children shackled to the large stone table reach proportions beyond horrific as the proctor's men stepped back and a lightning surge of electricity shot down upon the hitherto undisturbed liquid surface of a large open industrial barrel which set upon the center of the platform - causing lean fuel and corrosive liquids to pour out from within the container now breached, the greenish liquid which sluiced forth covering the expendable victims in a slick oil which brought on severe chemical burns directly on contact with their skin and, within seconds, quickly burning into their flesh to a degree which would make instant termination a mercy.

A merciless environment lay before her now in a geographical region which she had never before fathomed - for neither her normative life within the midwest nor even the astral forays to the point and to the

lands beyond the churning Atlantic had given her any indication that such a place existed.

The rise and fall of the wooded hills should in a normal apprehension be beautiful, yet the overwhelming sense of the place was that it was entirely meant for concealment - for evil deeds done in secret - even beyond the eyes of the organization itself, despite the fact that it was to them which the inhabitants therein were both imprisoned and employed.

With that level of secrecy came a degree of license most transgressive - ignited with the clear awareness of high-tier work, and very dangerous work, done under coercion.

Should they be required to put forth the utmost sacrifice while at the same time the questionable benefits afforded to the rank and file of the organization being withheld, they would, within the strictures given to them, compensate on the levels of excess that only creativity and available facility might possibly limit.

From his black domicile in the darkness of the tunnel in the woods beyond, Gaubni watched intently via methods most arcane and in a surveillance most harrowing in scope. Upon his idol the crusted blood of decades of sacrifice gleamed and marbled - the effulgence of a despot most dread.

He had sensed her coming and as several miles away the child stepped through the large hangar doors into the main hall of engineering, she now bereft of all except for the unfolding destiny that awaited her amidst the snarls of lust and blasphemy of the depraved citizenry,

there in that lonely place ruled over by a black god of silence - the grim sentinel from which flowed their exultation - a fell wind began to blow through the boughs of the hemlocks and beeches, stirring the air.

All along the ridgelines of the mountains the ever-present mist that hugged the landscape intermingled with the pollutants which streamed forth incessantly from the smokestacks of the industrial pursuits of engineering began to churn as the Great Demon brought Sadie into his embrace, a questionable welcome, but even more that hellish entity premeditated the embrace of the one still to come - the latter who would be his daughter in soul and in future in body, soul and deed in ways that would stretch the very limits of imagination - encompassing that which would, in time, shatter the very boundaries of sanity.

CHAPTER 36

Like the sudden blooming of a tiny lotus Sadie's legs were spread open - ankles attached to the manacles on the tilted examination apparatus, secured further within leather medical restraints in order to facilitate the fullest degree of access.

The proctor examined the speculum in his hands with more attention than he paid to the exposed and open flesh before him - his apprehension of Sadie being on all tactile and psychological levels clinical in the extreme and most dispassionate - a mechanism to be used, a resource for which he was now the predominant steward.

Sweat dripped down the proctor's lips, quivering in nervous premeditation of the afternoon's coming experiments and in want of his regular narcotic doses that accompanied the same. The accelerants not only steadied his hands but sharpened his mind - in the latter respect melding concentration and will combined with an increased neuroplasticity which engendered the more creative excesses of his evil genius.

The state of his surgery was a shambles, and the proctor found himself automatically reaching for a lab assistant not yet present - verbal chastisements issuing hotly from under his breath, admonitions which Sadie

found indiscernible but with relief at very least that they were not directed at her. His perturbation at lack of someone to throttle was washed away in a moment however as the doors of his workplace swung open - a metal gurney pushing open the dual hinged metal entranceway, a small host of his laboratory assistants in tow behind.

The proctor inhaled with a hiss and exhaled some moments after with a rattling sigh as he saw the human flesh upon the metal surface of the gurney, prepared by him meticulously with the careful assistance of his trainees within the days immediately prior and kept alive by life support mechanisms most questionable yet normative for the scope and general timbre of engineering center activities. Two male youths, teenage in years, bodies contorted in a horrific and unnatural arrangement, limbs broken and pulled in multiple strange directions by thin metallic wires arranged in an occult cipher which only he could discern.

Incapable of sitting much less standing, the two destroyed test subjects were forced into an upright position by a length of rebar which ran from a hole drilled in the surface of the gurney within extending upward along the surface of their spines, fastened with clamps and shining platinum bolts inserted directly into the spinal column itself. Milky eyes shot with blood from profuse internal bleeding gazed forward, eyelids drooped and encrusted with brownish pus-laden filth - barely cogent of their surroundings as a bloody froth gurgled from their mouths where every tooth had been smashed out earlier in the morning by the proctor's

assistants as the proctor had watched - the increase in pain and torment which their defanging had afforded an aesthetic if not clinical necessity which the proctor had vehemently demanded.

"What a lovely sight has appeared before my very own eyes!" cooed the proctor, a spring in his step, wringing his hands together and hastening toward the open alembic which the third among his young assistants had placed upon his main operating table - he slopping the clear, stringent liquid upon his long fingers and then putting them shakily to his still quivering lips, extending them to the back of his throat and suckling greedily - each trickle of the drug causing his eyes to widen in narcotic-induced psychosis which trebled his abjectly and brutal homosexual lust as he turned and gazed upon the unfortunate boys who would provide him with the needed focal point for his activities. Violence would beget violence upon violence upon violence and he found himself, suddenly, so very, very motivated to move forward - fanatically and with rapidity - wherever the Great Demon might lead him, wherever and however the signaled neural pathways which provided the access point to his demonic will might lead.

"Agios O Gaubni!" the proctor muttered in another rattling exhalation, the first of many, as he reached his fingers to unfasten the broach of his trousers - hands reaching downward and fingers finagling to find his member, increasingly swelling - within the lifeforce possessing in its DNA and RNA formulation the code which would unlock the genetic mechanisms which

would in turn unleash nightmares onto the world.

The proctor laughed maniacally, his eyes rolling back into their sockets.

"We see you now!" he squealed, surgeon's hands grasping the length of his extended, vascular penis as it bobbed out of its erstwhile encasing of dry-rotted, discolored briefs - an affectation which other members of the organization found absurd but which afforded him a bizarre satisfaction - an enjoyer of the limits of vanity beloved by the little girls which he so despised. The little girl before him now - Sadie - on the very burgeoning cusp of youthful, young womanhood - was bereft of all such garments and he eyed methodically with the observation afforded to him by science the stretched crotch, diverting his eyes briefly from his focal point - its pudenda still downy soft but promising within its depths the birthing which his intentions and the intentions of will and desire that engineering so dictated - bloodlines of the commandant and the Great Demon to conjoin, the proctor acting as proxy of the latter.

One of the proctor's assistants, dressed in a white laboratory coat as was his senior, removed the cap from a large clear jar full of semi-transparent lubricant, thrusting his hands within and withdrawing a generous amount. The proctor nodded greedily and the lab assistant approached, personally slathering an ample portion upon the length of the proctor's extended member - now rigid and fully erect.

As the proctor reached his dominant hand downward to his own exposed sex and began furiously rubbing - eyes transfixed with monomaniacal intensity

upon the two male youths on the gurney, his grisly creation, the lab assistant approached Sadie with a predator's gait - a barely concealed grin curling around the edges of his lips. Though the proctor was inveterate in his uranian orientation and although each of his assistants were expected to and did acquiesce to any and all unusual activities which the proctor may desire them to engage, many of them harbored lusts more typical to their particular age and demographic. As such it was with great pleasure that the lab assistant approached, only a few years older than Sadie herself, to coat her sex betwixt legs spread-eagled with the remainder of the gel. Had the proctor been in a position to observe he would have protested most profoundly, however as the case may be, his attention otherwise fully occupied, as the lab assistant correctly augured, the male youth facing Sadie availed himself not only of one agenda but several - his own tactile pleasure the least amongst them in terms of immediate import and lasting consequence.

Sadie's sex now covered in the gleaming semi-transparent gel, thickly coated, she stared forward into the gaze of the proctor's assistant - discerning that there was far more than met the eye as his own gaze dropped downward to one of the pockets of his tattered white coat. Palming a small black capsule in an act of sleight of hand, his other, still resting upon Sadie's vagina, stretched further down, massaging the lubricant around and then into her rectum - the sensation bringing her mind unbidden to the last true memories of her and her mother down in the hatch before the explosion - before

her pleasure in incest and self-pleasure was decimated, the paradigm shifting from transgressive, incestuous love between a mother and her daughter willed through mind and ascertained by the senses into blood pouring from her eardrums and body pierced with hard shrapnel in the deafening aftermath of ignited ordnance.

She felt the finger of the proctor's assistant penetrate once then twice and then, though she could not see it - the position in which she was bound leaving little room for observation - she could feel it - a foreign object inserted within and pressed far in for no chance of expulsion - the black capsule. Several feet away the proctor began to groan impatiently - his lust intermingling with his need to both stay orgasm and his desire for his personnel to move forward with their part of the experiment. The assistants knew the inherent command in the audible gesture - haste.

Her body having accepted the capsule which the lab assistant had inserted, he and the others amongst his peers busied themselves, but not before he took one final look down, eyes locking with the young girl. His visage belied, incongruously to the situation in which they both found themselves, a level of concern and a degree of dread - dread for what he had done and dread for the potential punishment should his machination be found out which would result in a terminal end - but only after a very long tenure under the grip of persons far more black in their abject sadism than the proctor. With a last and final look toward her he was gone - disappeared from her strict and limited range of vision - to a clinician's sink where he wiped away the lubricant gel

and any telltale forensic signs of his unauthorized anal penetration, any indicators on his person of the covert agency which the proctor's lack of surveillance had afforded and which his own secret agenda had engendered.

While the laboratory assistant who had effected the insertion of the black capsule into Sadie's entrails - operating from a remove - resumed his activities as the main assistant coordinator of the preliminaries of the aimed for insemination, another began his assigned task of note-taking of the proceedings. The proctor was obsessed with detail and proper cataloging of the experiments which he undertook, the compounds which he produced in secrecy and the overall thrust of his work - the record-keeping not only satisfying his own need to preserve his legacy for both the present and posterity but also as a means of insurance should sectors of engineering ever seek to inaugurate machinations against him. The notes, he felt, carefully taken and filed within internal reports continuously and stringently, would serve as a readily available testament to his successes - proof of his past and continuing worth to the engineering center and to the clandestine organization as a whole.

Upon the restraint chair Sadie felt herself becoming cold - an unnatural feeling coursing through her body in the minutes immediately proceeding the insertion of the capsule - the severity of its initial effects trebled both by her state of now near starvation and the ancillary and overwhelming stress to her central nervous system in reaction to the new and horrible environment in which

she now found herself. Through internal mechanisms she had for the most part cleansed herself of the immediate effects of the narcotics which the cult recruiters had administered without her conscious knowledge while in transport, however the one which she had been administered now, in the immediate, was something altogether different - different in its effects and different also in that she was aware of the administering of the same as well as the identity of the one so doing - at least by sight.

Within the muscles of her flesh she found, despite her depleted state, a growing strength - a flush of health, or something more than health in fact - as the unclassified narcotic contained within the laboratory assistant's delivery mechanism began to absorb and activate via the auspices of the involuntary rectal feeding. Inaugural sensations of cold were replaced with sensations of heat most infernal in their properties and a seemingly very aware, almost philosophical shift which transformed Sadie internally from the exhausted detainee she had been moments before to something more - an invidious harridan, sensate and aware of her worth and possessing an emotive response beyond umbrage at her bondage and more so that those so binding her were likely compatriots if not outright co-conspirators in her overall rendition and the more egregious acts which had transpired therein.

Stretching with all her might Sadie could do little more than raise her lower back slightly off the restraint chair - the leather straps which held down her limbs and upper body strict and immobilizing. Still she snarled in

her effort - the laboratory assistant who had administered the capsule pretending not to notice to a degree in his guilt while the youth taking notes began bisecting his attention between the proctor and the girl strapped down to the chair - beads of sweat causing her naked flesh to glisten beneath the high-wattage light which shone down from overhead, skin supple and pale reddening via the auspices of the narcotic which now coursed through her nervous system.

As a shattering of vision began to burst from within Sadie's consciousness - the initial signs of delirium beginning to take hold - the laboratory assistant hitherto unaccounted for reached for the same container of gelatinous lubricant which had anointed the genitalia of both Sadie and the proctor, removing a dollop from the interior side and slathering it across the thick length of a long shining drill bit attached to an ancient black plastic casing, the motor within rebuilt, modified - and optimized - for purposes which the original manufacturers would have never intended.

As he slathered the gel onto the length and tip of the instrument, the yellow extension cord attached to a generator burring angrily in the antechamber immediately outside the swinging surgery doors, the male youth eyed Sadie hungrily - imagining all that he would do to her should he be given the opportunity. That she was not the terminal subject of the test was a hope for such a future dispensation - whether her participation was willing or not - the object of his mechanical delivery on this day being the two modified twins upon the gurney - too destroyed in their present

state to have any inkling of what was to come.

Relegated thusly to his sex upon same sex drilling for the day - far more interested though he was in drilling into Sadie with an altogether more biological instrument - and with that the thought within his mind among his much more grim and grisly task laid out before him, the laboratory assistant, his mechanism now primed - a single finger revving and testing the million-per-second rotations of his instrument of execution - moved forward toward the gurney. The only screams which were to be heard were those of Sadie as she plotted her acts of ultimate revenge - plots upon terror-laden plots to unfurl like the black flags beneath the skull-bearing plinths in the desert which were her mother and father's heralds.

A sickening groan began to escape from the bloodied mouths of the twins, first the one and then the other as their skulls were breached - the smell of powdered bone and the burning black smoke of the drill engine working far beyond intended capacity filling the surgery with a funerary fetor.

Senses enlivened and the signal for which he had waited now present, the proctor barked at the nearest laboratory assistant in a high-pitched voice, faltering for control. Responding with appropriate haste the same assistant who had facilitated the covert dosing of Sadie approached - stretching a surgical glove upon the second, unoccupied hand of the proctor who flexed it once, twice and then lowered it to receive his dispensation. Then and only then and with a final cry of release the proctor ejaculated, his eyes riveted onto the male youths as they began to slump even despite their

horrific bondage, blood shooting from their brains in high pressure simultaneous to the proctor's own issue.

Surgical glove now coated in his own semen, breath panting in the aftermath of his auto-eroticism, the proctor moved toward Sadie in a fatherly manner. Though the sight of her feminine form disgusted him his distaste was lessened by the visions which he had so recently absorbed and by the fact that his action now - a fatherly gesture for one yet to be known - represented the hideous will of the Great Demon and as such his sense of mission subsumed all else before him. Several fingers of the gloved hand shoved into her vaginal opening, inward and upward as far as her physicality would allow, reaching the cervix. The more scholarly among the lab assistants watched the seconds pass on a watch which he had commandeered from supply for just this purpose - watching one minute pass, then two, then three. A nod to the proctor and he withdrew, fingers exiting in a slick motion from her sex - the proctor's lips curling and Sadie's eyes fluttering then closing as the the seed moved on a set, instinctual procession closer and closer to the womb.

CHAPTER 37

She had seen the Perquimans at high tide many times - and very rough wakes on at least a few occasions as the twice yearly hurricanes and tropical storms blew in from the Atlantic - but never this rough. She also knew well via her senses, those of the flittermouse, that tell-tale scent of low tide - strongest when the river lay still and placid after a long day beneath the scorching southern summer sun - but never a stench like she smelled now.

As she circled lazily in a soft counter-clockwise descent she could see white caps rising close to and then washing over the bridge that connected the land north towards Winfall to the area northwest of Durant's Neck. The dirt bridge where she passed earlier had already been long submerged, since twilight, well before the time the brackish waters of the point bore on greenish tides bloated corpses, bluish in fleshly tinge, white, swollen tongues protruding from mouths now silent.

On the far bank opposite the point, inhabiting that more often than not quiet landscape on the farthest outskirts of Hertford proper some, still living, ran screaming toward the shoreline, trailing smoke and lightning-like filaments from the white phosphorous burning their bodies, the green, brackish waters churning upriver from the point offering no succor for

them on this night nor for any night to come.

The current flowed in reverse now and that meant the end - the alarm had been sounded and would not cease until the nuclear codes had been activated - continuing and piercing through fiery passage of overarching nuclear conflagration and holocaust - far into the future until the time that the commander ruled as despot from behind the razor-wire. Sadie's mother not dead as she had believed, not smoldering on the pyre on the plain outside the hatch but rather there, then, at his side.

On the restraint chair in the proctor's surgery Sadie's body was beyond tense and growing rigid, creating a scene of panic among the engineering personnel present - a thin white foam not unlike the white caps upriver from the point trickling down her face - now growing disturbingly pale and hitherto trembling lips seeming to indicate something akin to a smile as the seed reached its mark - an embryo forming in utero immediately.

In her mind's eye the waters flowing below her roiled, her leathern wings outstretched even as the waters of the poisoned pool in the woods on the border of the wilderness became calm. The greenish tint of the water became greener still as the algae settled upon its surface and the vision faded - the final vision augured by Wendy and the shade being that of Sadie upon the restraint chair - abdomen sweaty and taut and within a dark secret, the profundity of which still yet incipient.

"Yes..." hissed the shade to Wendy, emphasizing to her an import seemingly beyond belief.

"You are the child and she is the mother! Thus your

bloodline revealed to you - for the lieutenant's actions just now were but a mechanism - a fate decided well before for him so that you could receive the message which we - all of us - now relay."

Wendy shuddered and looked to the west - beyond, the periphery of the experimental region - toward the vast wilderness which stretched before her - a region unknown.

As the darkness of the fading twilight began to increase, from the shade a blinding point of light shone, intruding through the darkness and lighting upon a granite dome sparsely forested which lay miles upon miles into the distance, illuminating a harsh place - technical in its approach and bereft of all life.

"As the point was your mother's origin and the hatch her place of preliminary testing in her unfolding destiny, that for you shall be both!"

Wendy stood and, swathing her black hood about her head, trod forth.

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CHAPTER 38

A horrific audial cacophony of young girls screaming in abject despair echoed disturbingly from the cells that extended in a multitude of directions along fell hallways stretching out from one of the circular command centers. Housed within that center and each other like it were stationed ever-watching and predatory rotating closed-circuit television surveillance upon each of the individual cells and their present occupants - detailing in distorted screen vision the myriad humiliating naked punishments, molestations and outright torture, most brutal in nature, that took place within.

This was only a small filament of the vast underground network of dungeons beneath the commander's headquarters, a part of the commandant's training center in a titular sense but housed closer to the subterranean dwelling place of the commandant herself in reality - as such possessing a level of retained technological infrastructure unknown further toward the surface, each single tendril of the vast network an exact clone of many identically similar cell blocks and surveillance pods that existed in profuse number there in the most secret networks of the commandant's

dungeons.

High and towering concrete walls slathered with greasy, shining black paint flanked steel support beams, interspersed with heavy industrial steel doorways bearing meticulously maintained locking mechanisms and dual purpose restraint and feeding portals extended in quarter mile sections along every possible direction insofar as the geography and engineering thresholds allowed.

Passages one-way into a horrific interior, the only traditional point of access being the concealed doors within the ECU which led down into the commandant's training center and then towards even more securely guarded clandestine ways within that underground lair leading down, further still, to those halls and chambers most secret and dread - toward the direct administration areas of the commandant herself. One way in, one way out.

Merciless and cruel beatings by cult recruiters and other selected graduates of the commandant's training center upon quivering and expectant naked flesh was the rule, never the exception. The latter, subjects of physical ruination most systematic from the immediate reddened topical scar then to blue and black bruises and then later still to opened slices of flesh amidst such bruising, producing rivulets of sickening crimson trails of blood tracing spiderwebs of gore down purple weals on exposed buttocks and thighs of the commandant's most choice and succulent morsels of human specimens.

Girls, one and all in these vast cell blocks purposed by her, tender in age and profuse in number, their young

male counterparts subject to predetermined fates all the more grisly and decidedly more terminal.

Hers was a cult of an authoritarian matriarchy most cruel and as such her maidens, her harlots and matrons alike inhabiting the most clandestine recesses of the facility were carefully guarded assets, subjected to programming both broad, specific and most meticulous in conception and execution. Natural selection would, in more normative circumstances, engender a more balanced fail ratio among their number, however in the ultra-pressurized psychological environment where the girls were, simply by dint of their habitation within the commandant's dungeons, counted amidst the highest tier of the most secret sector of the organization, failure was not an option. Even the slightest inability to program only providing an assurance of enduring supplementary ordeals even further beyond the remotely sane or ethical in nature and execution.

Prior to their exfiltration into the outer regions both Britta and Bluebird had been guests in these areas, the dungeons, privy to sights and activities straining the limits of human experience, the sort of which their initial cult handlers had never seen and could most likely never conceive. Many nights, shivering or sweating in naked exposure, depending on the whims of the commandant's climatic control, there against the careening black block walls - minds churning in hideous drug and trauma-induced contemplation as they spied senior sisters such as Chazona and Winzeria directing high-tier acolytes and the most sadistic lieutenants amidst the sisterhood

in operations within the recesses of the dungeons.

As the preliminary planning stages of the expansion of the cult via the auspices of the chapels had begun to commence in tandem to the inevitable approach of the rally and the military campaign to the west, additional and surreptitious points of entry and exit had been devised.

Fissures in the earth, clandestine tunnels oftentimes dangerously graded, set with steel tracks for their intended purposes - the construction of such even more dangerous, performed by boys both youth and of tender age alike who were brought down from the commandant's training center. The need for high secrecy and the very dangerous nature of the work itself required the employment of dross - human mechanisms which would be terminated at the end of their verbal contract and then utilized for other purposes. For this reason the boys from the commandant's training center were chosen rather than shock troops, the former males which had been earmarked, often by Britta and Bluebird themselves in the weekly pontifex reports compiled by themselves and utilizing information supplied by lesser den mothers, as being not suitable for surging toward specialized roles in one of the myriad organizational sectors upon graduation but selected for an altogether more terminal assignment in the immediate based upon equally specialized criteria. All, whether existing in temporary stasis between brutally long shifts at the end of a lightless day in the dungeons, working along a predetermined line of fate, or whether ascending to the surface where their bodies would be allowed to mature

and grow amidst vagaries of fate more chaotic amidst particular wings of the organization, serving the purpose of the commandant, each and every one.

Britta especially had enjoyed herself as the work had begun on the secret infrastructural expansion which, in order to meet necessary deadlines, had commenced at nothing short of hyper-speed - a chance for the senior sisters to test their own methods of psychical control, trauma-programming and sexual imprinting in service of the nuclear death goddess upon a seemingly limitless pool of subjects. Yet, potential doom was also upon their own heads, for results and results quickly there must be.

A horrific evolutionary process had started to turn there in the dungeons in dread procession, a wheel of torture, pain and merciless creation - a horrible birthing. Far beyond the natural - forced toward manifestation by the blind and unswerving will of the commandant. From a hidden vantage point in her innermost chambers she watched as her slaves traversed the chthonic landscapes of her dungeons, her secret projects now underway powered by a triumvirate of sweat, punishment and blood.

As her own young daughter, not of flesh biological but by flesh tempered with the lash of her discipline, Britta watched spellbound as the slaves went about their toil under the hallucinogen and speed-tempered eyes of the cult recruiters, the witches. Feminine, milky gazes monitoring the bodies under the administration of their whips as they gradually starved under the rigors of their forced labor - figures previously hearty under the standards of the commandant's training center becoming

emaciated skeletons - the eyes of the cult recruiters exuding control, the defeated eyes of their male slaves emanating awareness of death - then psychosis.

Britta had within herself become conscious of an ever-shifting change in her own levels of assessment of the clandestine organizational machinations of which she was now both witness and steward, along with clear awareness of how she herself on all levels had become changed - distorted and mutated by the rigors of the ordeal-based programming to which she had been and still was subjected. The burden of evidence in the latter all the more evidentiary as her own physicality began to shift - the monitoring and surveilling eyes of the senior sisters facilitating the metamorphosis by denuding her of briefly familiar garments, transforming the shame of nakedness into a writhing, clipped, sexual and sexualized monstrosity seasoned by the bruises of leather instruments of torment set angrily across her back. She had been raised upon human flesh and it was now, in her position as tormentrix extreme that she lusted for that which was set before her, like a banquet, the weals of corporal punishment beginning to dry upon her buttocks, bisected by the greasy black hide of her now customary garment, while moisture built without recourse to stopping upon succulent mouth - yearning for the taste, fleshly incest - yearning for the most forbidden yet inevitably most satisfying of fruits - kind to kind.

She often spied her older sister, Bluebird, replete with authority and forward-thinking responsibility, there

in her thirteenth year, pacing upon the far walls of the black-slathered penitentiary foundation. Cold even as the glistening splatters of blood flooding throughout the dungeons on many occasions reflected upon the slick white latex of her skintight suit, creating an apparently gory spectral sight for those many who viewed her from the black vast openings of the dungeons. A cold predator, so Britta assigned, so ravenous for a reaping more chaotic and evil that she could administer lesser cullings robotically, like an automaton. Whether or not Britta's opinions of Bluebird in those moments were true or conjecture, what was without questioning genuine was Britta's own very tactile and very visceral appetites now very much at the forefront.

One day - though whether in truth day or night could not be readily ascertained by the young sisters there in the commandant's realm, an area permeated by neither but rather by a grim artificial in-between, existing in an ongoing twilight in seeming perpetuity - Britta had stood by herself, back towards one of the black walls of the dungeon, alone, watching, expectant. On that day the level of blood washing across the rock base of the dungeon bay had been excessive, the iron stench of the profuse liquid and ready evidence of the flesh from which it had been recently procured churning even the stomach of Britta in the midst of her own cannibalistic lust. Britta choked down her bile all the same, however, and considered her position and that of Bluebird. Bluebird had left hours ago - she, Britta, left in the comparative purgatory of the far observation point, set upon a slight ledge while Bluebird became a speck in

Britta's far vision - a shining white shape beneath a towering and equally shining figure in black - the commandant.

A length of time had passed since the two had disappeared into the distance and in her isolation Britta felt herself growing gradually more and more feral - a hollow in the pit of her stomach and an unwieldy and expansive hostility building within. All of a sudden Britta felt a chill in the air, then a freezing - her eyes growing wide and fingers splaying in involuntary reaction to the sensation of near frost upon her mostly exposed skin. In the distance a strange clicking sound ensued, mingling with the sloshing of the blood being diverted in the bays, then the air around Britta retracted. Her eyes opened and before her stood Winzeria.

The witch smiled, or assumed for her what might be the closest possible semblance to such an expression insofar as she could or cared to muster, thin cruel lips curling back over teeth profusely stained in an indeterminable and highly unnatural color, clearly the result of years imbibing the most potent of the organizational narcotics specifically utilized within the cult and particularly and most predominantly within its higher tiers for purposes theirs and theirs alone. Britta gazed toward her with narrowed eyes, her internal mechanisms of fight or flight having been inaugurated immediately, yet with no recourse toward either all she could do is remain stationary, still in her paranoia.

Winzeria's eyes dilated slightly and a cold sweat began to drip down her corpse-pale face as Britta felt a pang of nausea in her gut as she heard the strange

sibilating sound of Winzeria's telepathic transmission resounding loudly and audibly in her mind.

"COME WITH ME..."

Winzeria relaxed her face then, furling, teeth before hideously bared becoming now covered, her lips pursed in assessment of her subject and domination of the same as her eyes gestured toward the opposite side of the dungeon - toward one of the dark entrances to one of the many tunnels now underway, boring into the earth.

Britta nodded with her own mouth slightly opened, moist lips and an interior almost diseased red in hue, the indescribable sensation of being the recipient of Winzeria's voice telepathy startling yet bringing a certain clearness when coupled with the very direct nature of the command prompt given. While the request might bring with it potentially painful consequence, as most things did in the horrific world of the commandant, the command was direct and non-cryptic and, as such, bringing with it the confidence of obedience without hesitation.

Turning slowly and proceeding at a relaxed pace Winzeria stepped down from the ledge and Britta followed - across the recessed bay on cement floor, the blood now pooling in some parts to the height of Winzeria's ankle and nearly up the middle of Britta's calves - shredded and unrecognizable chunks of bloodied flesh and organs congealing upon the wetted surface in the shallow spots, floating amidst the gore in those deeper.

Britta felt her mood begin to lift, rising out from the miasma of speculation, unsurety and isolation into the despotic clarity of absolute obedience and building mania. The atmosphere of the abattoir no longer caused her anxiety and she found herself cackling lowly to herself as she listened to her legs slosh through the blood and felt one of Winzeria's hands rest upon the rise of one of her curling hips as they traversed the bloody internal landscape together. Here was belonging. Here was identity realized.

Packs of cult recruiters in small huddles here and there across the arena could be seen from the corners of Britta's eyes, some conversations hushed and some being held forth in ever-rising screams as they administered the complicated work of fulfilling the will of the commandant in their current taskings - the bodies and minds of their underlings their tools, the commandant herself the center of control at the furious helm. While the inhabitants of the old world had in those latter days before the alarming present not allowed themselves to conceive of a real hell in the fullness of properties so posited by numerous religious books of antiquity, by their actions they had been both witting and unwitting facilitators of causing the shift, the nuclear holocaust, from which the seeds of hell might flourish and expand - painted upon a canvas now abominable enough to be suitable towards its purpose. Now a real hell was being built - not existing in some plane of existence accessed only by methods most occult, or entered into involuntarily by dint of profound transgression, but rather a hell on earth - the cult recruiters its arch-

deacons, the commandant its Satan. This was the hell accessed by dint of birth itself and, as the razor-wire encircling the organizational territories expanded, the deepest circles of the same became evermore present and inescapable, their touch felt by all.

Winzeria communicated no more with Britta as they made their way steadily forward through the gore toward the black opening - the simple command to follow being enough for now - yet Winzeria continued to probe the mind of the young girl as they walked together, exerting pressure in some instances, hastening certain thought processes within Britta both latent and overt. Overwhelming feelings of security washed over Britta as the black gate of the tunnel loomed closer, the probing of Winzeria's mind stretching into her own facilitating an almost sexual release, the feel of bare hand resting gently upon the curve of her exposed hip so different from what she was used to experiencing at the hands of the cult recruiters - said hands usually grasping cruel leather straps and other instruments of torture often of the commandant's own design. A sense of coming revelation coupled with sensuality permeated by darkness preoccupied her, the looks of fear from the disposable male slaves here and there along their path, glances tinged with secondary additives of reverence and desire, pleased her.

Despite the vastness of the bay their passage through passed by very quickly, almost like a dream for Britta. She did not question even to herself why they had not taken the circular way - along the ledge - longer but

easier, instead choosing the direct route straight across, through the blood which now soaked the bottom of Winzeria's robes and which stained her own legs in an angry red. From the tunnel opening now directly before them drifted the deep scent of disturbed earth, a rich dust issuing forth from the rent like smoke. One of the cult recruiters manning the entrance, senior in station yet lesser in rank than Winzeria herself - as were most of the cult recruiters there in the bay - extended two bundles of small black tubes, breathing devices, yet Winzeria dismissed her and her offering with the slightest leftward nod of her head, causing the other cult recruiter to grasp the collected apparatus to her chest and withdraw in self-consciousness and shame. Winzeria removed her hand from Britta's hip and grasped the girl's chin, raising it so that their faces met, piercing eyes boring into Britta's own, slightly glazed, belying a mind open for impression. Turning away quickly, Winzeria proceeded into the tunnel, Britta close at her heels. Despite the heavy sediment-bearing air, the earth disturbance nearly blotting out the pale lights installed into the rounded ceilings fortified with local timber, Britta found her breathing regulating, conditioning herself internally in a fashion that would spell quick death for those not versed in the psycho-physical disciplines of the commandant's cult.

Although the tunnel was bored for the most part straight, proceeding in a direct line along a gradual centigrade aimed toward the surface, Britta's own mind spun with daydreams of complicated, circuitous routes through tunnels much darker and much more fell in

nature than those in which she was now physically present. Full of dead-ends, false leads, angles and dips and rises in incline seemingly wholly designed to disorient, confuse and lock the mind of those so traversing into a black enchantment. Winzeria smiled to herself, though no muscles moved upon her face, for she apprehended these visions as they occurred within Britta's mind - in these visions, Winzeria knew, Britta was finding the internal paths within herself, penetrating the complex matrix of her physicality, discovering the hidden vectors of control - mastery of which was the salient hallmark of the commandant's chosen.

"Only a few more hundred yards forward," whispered Winzeria through more natural means than before, though still tinged with the permeating sorcery that was for all effective purposes her baseline. Britta croaked in response, a raspy sound inhuman in resonance yet indicating to Winzeria all that she needed to know. The witch stroked the young girl's head, shorn like her own, in a brisk motion, similar to how one would handle a canine - emphatic, brief affection - cursory, underlining command. Dark brown filth of the mine sticking to her legs, Britta trod forward.

Without exercising the control that Winzeria had imparted to her Britta would have surely choked to death in the thick dust - the clouds of disturbed earth swirling all the more as the witch and her young charge pierced through ever deeper into the tunnel's interior, the passage still lit only by the pale sparse lights that had been installed at semi-regular intervals throughout, the bare minimum required to facilitate the continuation of

the male slaves' grim work. For several brief seconds Britta thought that she could could hear a cry further ahead, faint, distressed and, as the dust finally began to settle and become less of a visual impediment, she wondered where the workers along this particular fault were situated - she had passed none since entering.

As the two made their way further in, closer and closer to Winzeria's approximate destination point, though what would be waiting for them there and what would occur once arrived as of yet unspecified by her cult recruiter handler, Britta found her mind turning toward the weeks so recently past in the commandant's training center with Bluebird - the formative days of her own individualized and blasphemous engineering post rendition. Their initial confrontation with the commandant herself had been a turning point, a signifier that they had passed that threshold of no return, though the experiencing of that threshold was so colossal in import that the memory blurred in her mind. A vague vision, brought along on gossamer wings flecked with blood. That had occurred in the dungeons, in an even more secure and select area than the cells and the expanse which she had now spent many days, yet it was the commandant's training center proper and the time spent there which inhabited the forefront of her memory and consciousness. The seemingly endless trauma-induced programming, interspersed only with a few brief hours within her own cell, a portion of which inhabiting a sleep that was more like half-life, bombarded by subliminal command prompts echoing like ghostly whispers through headphones and

sometimes reinforced through hidden speakers beneath her bed - the organization, ever present. It was in those times, both before her initial meeting with Bluebird, but most pronouncedly after, that effected the intended programming of being an actor in a total environment - so authoritarian, totalitarian and despotic that her existence before became a dream and her present - a waking nightmare. Although Bluebird was her senior in the cult, she did not know all that Britta had experienced - specialized treatment in the most broad sense of the term and the most severe - for often when Britta drifted into unsettling sleep upon waking she would find special handlers waiting, clothed in all encompassing black and identities completely hidden, the night stalkers.

She smelled blood, she apprehended flesh - the cannibalism of her upbringing in the dusky moon-soaked hills and mountains of West Virginia always present within her - bred into her very DNA and RNA cellular structure. Even though some aspects of her past seemed to be nearly erased, the hot humid sweat-soaked nights writhing on the bearskin of the field marshal's tent filament of a filament of a dream, the hunger was real. She felt it always, sinking into her guts like a knife, and despite the fact that the speed-laced gruel and the rendered protein from harvested corpses was proffered in comparatively copious amounts to the high-tier within the commandant's training center, still she salivated for more. Red, bloody flesh recently torn from a living, breathing human. The conspiracy and very much terminal swindle on behalf of her mother, brothers, sisters and self under the careening shadows of the

Appalachian old growth dwelt within her by very instinct. She was a night predator, a creature, human in the titular sense, bred on madness and consuming victims most choice - kind to kind - as those so feasting became, in the by and by, an almost other species altogether.

The night stalkers were a breed unto themselves amongst the cult recruiters who were in and of themselves a decidedly strange lot - stranger than even the most horrifying members of the various other organizational sectors encompassing the breadth and width of the same. Among the organization, excepting only the armed elements sent afield for raids, surveillance and intelligence, and these to a lesser degree, in terms of distance, it was only the cult recruiters who went into areas far-flung from organizational control - spearheads of questionable agendas, the intricacies of which were only fully known by the commandant herself. On a lateral scale yet inversely so the night stalkers were only present within the commandant's training center and the dungeons beneath - a species bred in darkness and inhabiting darkness. Throughout Britta's tenure in the commandant's training center Bluebird had never mentioned this special detachment and in truth by dint of her nature Britta did not believe that Bluebird knew of their existence whatsoever.

The night stalkers were developed under very special applied training mechanisms - the initiation points of their grooming varied but their recruitment

demographic always selected among females of a child-bearing age, including most often the painfully young in the immediacy of their becoming biologically capable of doing so. An impregnation amidst much trauma and greater and more severe trauma to follow through the course of the pregnancy. Soon after the time of the birth both the mother and child were dispatched by their seniors amidst the subcult, the death of the infant the more grisly in execution, the death of the mother herself a sham. The older victim revived, eyes flickering in knowing terror, three to five minutes later - just as the body of the infant child began to elicit its peculiar stench - that particularly sweet smell of fresh bloodshed. It was that blood with which the newly minted night stalker would record her training notes and minutes of the collective training within the closed-off section of the dungeons in which they were domiciled amidst top secrecy in the days and weeks to come, and it was the meat of that freshest and most intimate of corpses that the mother would sup upon as her only sustenance within a similarly pre-arranged period in a cycle continually repeated as their number increased.

Britta remembered the stalkers coming to her in the dead of the night - for in the commandant's training center, unlike the dungeons, there was some semblance of the natural progression of days due to their at least visual access to the internal courtyards from within the internal parapets, the large rooms within those towers often utilized for housing the baby brigades, the parapets visible from elsewhere at the commander's headquarters only from an aerial view, an impossible

vantage for surveillance within the post nuclear landscape.

She would hear a swishing of fabric and her eyes would open, slowly and, inevitably, and she would see them arranged in a squad - three to four - their uniforms more concealing than that of the cult recruiters, no flesh exposed whatsoever. Contributing to their anonymity was also the fact that they seemed to a degree completely asexual - for there was no semblance through the thick robes and assorted black garments that one of the witches inhabited the same. Their silhouette against the block walls of the barracks were broader in the shoulder and rigid - non-feminine - yet their movements, when operating, were altogether more fluid than that of a man.

Although she had been woken by dint of hypnotic command, though not in trance, and despite the fact that organizational narcotics coursed through her veins, Britta found herself disturbed in the extreme that the figures of the night stalkers seemed to shimmer like static at the slightest movement, their presentation almost like that of a hologram under duress - first as their robes rustled slightly as they stood arranged and assessing her - then even more so as they moved in for the rendition. Having never visually apprehended any similar phenomena among the company of the cult recruiters nor amidst any of the other nearly inhuman characters inhabiting at various times the torture center and its more secretive areas Britta assigned this particular trait as singular to the night stalkers alone.

As they would make their way toward her almost by rote none of the other children would awaken nor in

their sleep seem to be disturbed in the least - the slumber of many being very deep despite or perhaps because of the grinding organized chaos of life in the barracks - inclusive of its excesses and rigors and its inevitable terrors, the body calling up deep and instinctual recuperative survival mechanisms whilst dwelling within an atmosphere and environment of seemingly ever-present threat.

On the rare occasion that one of the members of the baby brigades in her dormitory had awakened, instances of which had been very few in number, the night stalkers would withdraw from within their shimmering frames a bright object - thin, wand-like and glowing eerily with a funerary, corpse-like illumination - upon its peak an orb glowing somewhat brighter than the shaft.

At the sight of any eyes other than her own opening, always warily so, or small frame bending at the waist for better vantage point, sitting upward to ascertain what had caused the sudden shift in the atmosphere of the dormitories, one of the night-stalkers would move forward and depress their lighted wands upon the forehead of the offender - the latter promptly dropping, seemingly naturally, but in fact decidedly unnaturally, into a sleep most deep and entirely devoid of memory.

Then, the mostly symbolic threats appropriately stifled, the night stalkers would move in toward their ultimate target - Britta herself.

Britta never felt that she had been unduly coerced in their abduction of her person by any divers methods - insofar as resistance was effectively futile whatever shape or form training amongst the commandant's cult

might take - though the prompt at her sudden wakening was in her estimation most assuredly a sign of the more sorcery-laden aspect of the night stalkers, in their constitution and their methods, within themselves and in the very nature of their coming forth by night. She proffered herself willingly, as a prey would to the predator, though in the more wily aspects of her mind she contemplated why she herself had been chosen, but far beyond that - beyond ego - she considered on a level most fleshly what promises these beings might fulfill, what black rapture might be experienced under their very select training - and what method she herself might learn.

Basins of blood and flesh would await her, there in the downward spiraling levels of the dungeons beneath the commandant's training center and sometimes in cells on the far periphery that had been earmarked for their own particular purpose - those latter staging areas always bereft of their props, furniture and further apparatus well before waking hours and the next shift within the torture center who, if they should stumble upon the same, would find them empty and abandoned as always - awaiting further assignment.

Her rendition by the night stalkers was much different than the myriad occasions in which she had been forcefully conveyed hither and thither within the commandant's greater lair throughout her training - no rough grasping of resistant limbs, no jostling as she was carried either with her foreknowledge or sudden arrest toward punishments and programming most bleak. The touch of the night stalkers was different altogether - a

brief, strong smell of ozone and she was on her feet - black, hallucinatory flickering hands upon her arms that felt light as a feather, and Britta, rather than walking between them, keeping pace, felt herself floating several inches above the air - conveyed and conveying herself by dark forces preternatural and fell.

Once situated at their collective point of destination, wherever in the labyrinthine halls of the infrastructure where they may find themselves, Britta denuded herself of her own garments without request or questioning by the night stalkers and they - in their strangeness - never spoke, ever exuding their deathlike silence, but somehow waiting, curious. Britta attempted to gauge the constitution of the night stalkers during her first confrontations as she undressed - lingering fingers upon her own flesh as she removed her garments - yet no human lust could be discerned within the shimmering figures - only a cold and somewhat statistical observation amidst their patient waiting.

Britta's own apprehension of their very threatening nature, most base and ingrained to their kind, came upon her in the first instance as they lifted her - weightlessly - onto the shining stainless steel apparatus onto which she was manacled and strapped, now naked - arms bent and immobile, legs bent at the knees, posterior stretched open and thrusting forth most obscenely. Once bound, thin black tubes were inserted without delay by the night stalkers into various orifices - excepting her mouth - two per opening - drawing forth fluids and facilitating an influx of other fluids of a

chemical nature of a clandestine composition, designed to aggravate and elicit tendencies most specific. As she stared down at the cement floor, helpless in her bonds, she heard the rattling of a gurney from a near distance and then the scraping of metal upon metal as the night stalkers dislodged its payload.

Within a few brief minutes the vat had been situated beneath her face where her head and shoulders extended beyond the metal frame - the vat of a similar construction, stainless steel - filled several feet deep with frothy crimson blood in which floated large chunks of freshly harvested human meat, sometimes less than an hour severed from the bone. Britta's eyes dilated involuntarily, her deep-seated hunger triggered, at the sight of reddened human flesh mingling seamlessly with subcutaneous fat sheathed with gradually loosening skin - tendons chopped in half during the course of the butchery which facilitated the special harvest mingling the sickly white and yellowish of their compromised interiors into the human broth.

A burning sensation would wash over Britta's body as the night stalkers slathered certain peculiar topical chemicals over the most sensitive parts of her young body and, as the burning sensation increased - from warming to distinctly uncomfortable to infernal - the vat beneath her began to slowly rise. She was immobile, her naked child's body in obscene exposure fastened tightly and painfully held to the stainless steel surgical apparatus, yet her neck which protruded out from the gurney was afforded some small degree of movement. Her internal body composition changed drastically and

violently as her stomach was emptied via one of the black tubes inserted into one nostril while her stomach lining was coated with a specially conditioned primer via the tube inserted into the other, causing her stomach to lurch and growl. From the three tubes inserted into her rectum one emptied her bowels with a strong vacuum device while the other facilitated a steady influx of the predominant narcotic - absorbed anally and now beginning to overwhelm both her normative bodily functions as well as her consciousness. The vat rose closer and closer to Britta's open, salivating mouth, click by resounding click as it was raised steadily in half-inch increments by one of the night stalkers.

Once within distance Britta utilized the slight movement afforded her within her bondage to strike, her neck snapping downward like a viper - the vat raised by one final click and her mouth now plunged into the iron-scented human soup - slurping in violent, maniacal and uncontrollable bloodlust. This feeding and her wherewithal to effect such accelerated and refined by the influence of the night stalkers and their machinations both mechanical and psychical in nature, for they particularly were, in Britta's estimation, among all those who dwelled in the commandant's training center and the dungeons beneath (save the commandant herself), the most inhuman. As she drank, consumed and drank again she reveled in her increased ability of consumption - that despite little to no airways cleared and available to her due to the insertion of the thin black tubes within her nostrils and the incessant blood feeding via the auspices of her mouth she felt no lack of breath, no need to come

to surface. As the blood and flesh continued to pour into her the vacuum mechanism's holding tank slowly turned from the blackish brown of her excreta to harrowing red as the pumping mechanism gurgled disturbingly with the increased flow pouring into her intestines, pushed forcefully downward from her stomach which now began to swell uncomfortably even by sight. Beneath her closed lily-white eyelids the orbs of her vision began to turn bright crimson and her face and body begin to flush as her cannibalism reached the threshold of and then passed beyond human capability.

Their robes flickering with seemingly electrical current, the night stalkers communicated one amongst another, one of their number withdrawing a long snake-like metallic cord - upon one end was attached a black box bearing a single shining chrome activated switch and upon the other a pursed device of a metal similar to the cord itself but fortified and strengthened by extra time, attention and refinement within the secret furnaces of the engineers. Covering one gloved hand with a generous amount of the grotesque viscous solution which had effected the topical burning upon Britta's flesh, the night stalker equipped with the device curled its hand upon the base of the cord and swept it upward through a tightly closed fist, coating the length of the cord in the gleaming chemical solution. With the similarly gloved finger of opposite hand the remaining gel was curled onto the night stalker's fingertip and the device at the tip of the cord now generously wettened and coated - the point of insertion. The night stalkers nodded to each other and the light within their staging

area dimmed by dint of will alone as the cord was threaded into the remaining hitherto unused third black tube inserted into Britta's anus, moving steadily inward toward its target - the lubricant masking all sound of its insertion, the only thing audible in the cell being the sound of Britta's mouth gorging upon blood and flesh.

With an inhuman howl Britta's head whiplashed up from the contents of the vat as the cord found its target, the device activated by the chrome switch held by the night stalker attendant on cue upon the length of the apparatus first meeting resistance. Mists of blood flew backwards from the violence of her neck's motion, reddened flecks flying backward in hallucinatory spray from the tips of her hair, at that time not yet shorn into the skinhead appearance which would become her hallmark.

Entire face and neck covered entirely in a death mask of reddened viscera and choice, selected plasma harvested by the night stalkers, Britta howled anew as the device at the end of the metal cord opened - activated - clawed needle tips expanding within her guts - nine narcotic-laced needles, thick in gauge and grimly exploratory in purpose - punching into her intestines and withdrawing sickeningly by dint of an ancillary mechanism built within - piercing and pulling filaments of her internal flesh into the cylindrical tube of the barrel of the syringe.

As quickly as the mechanism had effected its mission the procedure was complete - the lubricated metal cord now carrying at its tip the samples from the biopsy pulled out so quickly from within Britta's guts that her

entire body began to shudder uncontrollably. While one of the night stalkers proceeded to withdraw the three black tubes from her anus, now covered in slick black filth, terminating the action of the vacuum tank and narcotic drip in the process, another member of their clandestine fold effected a similar extraction at her other bodily extremity - briskly, painfully yet with expert precision removing the thin black tubes from both of her nostrils.

The heavy bondage restraints that had held her immobile to the metal gurney were released and, still entirely disoriented and inhabiting a spatial dimension of consciousness on the very edge of sanity, Britta found herself roughly pushed into an adjoining cell - a several ton reinforced concrete vault door slammed behind her and, from above, torrents of high pressure water pouring down upon her - cold, shocking, cleaning the blood and viscera from her naked flesh.

She would never remember and never had managed to recall, ex post facto, what had happened after that - her body at some point passing out in abject exhaustion from the sheer intensity of the ordeal, her pale frame falling and crumpling upon the hard concrete floor amidst the water and blood commingling.

When her consciousness would return it would be the next morning and she would be situated as she had been before the nocturnal rendition by the night stalkers - dressed in her underthings and lying beneath the rough fabric of her organization-issued military-style blanket there in the barracks dormitory. Although the import of her night before seemed nightmarish, hallucinatory -

beyond the scope of realism in its bizarre timbre even for the commandant's training center - Britta knew that all had indeed occurred as so recently imprinted upon her mind, for her own flesh would not, could not deceive her.

She knew the taste - and the effects - of human flesh and, after these forays with the night stalkers, happening with increasing frequency, she knew now the most singular effects of consuming flesh in excess.

CHAPTER 39

When the lash of the whip came down upon her flesh for the last time, Astrid raised her face toward the far altar of the chapel with a sly, self-congratulatory sneer.

She had accepted the proxy punishment and, now the scapegoat of the sisters' infiltration into the experimental area regime - the face which she chose to be discovered - would be facing Bluebird and all that entailed while she, ensconced within her own private chambers, rehearsed the psychodramas of the cult recruiters.

Accepting, rejecting, absconding and betraying - pressed upon flesh, pressed upon mind. The harrowing descending fog of the authority of the senior cult recruiters made its way invariably to each and every witch - no matter how far flung geographically.

For Astrid, in her own level of psychical development, all was a plaything - a trifle. As she smiled, raising herself from the ceremonial apparatus utilized in her own private chapel for beatings, within her mind she saw what was now becoming of her scapegoat - the one upon whom the blame was placed for all the allegedly illicit goings-on by the cult recruiters in the experimental area - the intrigues, the constructions of the chapels both in the central area and in areas elsewhere, but near.

Despite her visions of the needle-bearing globe bearing closer and closer to the naked flesh of the cult recruiter acolyte who had been proffered for sacrifice, there, under the maniac glare of Bluebird, somehow Astrid was still not secure in her victory - something was amiss.

As she tried to brush the thought from her mind she could see the face of the shorn-headed one, the younger sister, twirling in glee upon a far tower unknown to her, in a woods in an area also unknown, her near-naked body covered in the gore of the most choice, reddish consistency. Was it the blood of the cult recruiters themselves? Was her gambit failing, doomed as it was?

Upon an area already blasphemed and profaned amidst the highest echelons of the leadership, a continual poisoning progressed still across the area recently conquered in the name of the organization - a struggle occurring on a ghostly realm of existence. Chess pieces moved upon a sinister, ghastly miasma of peripheral dimension and consciousness. This arena was only pierced in its fullness by the cult recruiters and those trained under the apocalyptic disciplines of the commandant, yet the effects of what went on there were invariably felt by all.

Astrid felt herself begin to shake and then suddenly freeze in place - immobile - as she saw within her mind's eye the vision of the black globe-like apparatus driven by Bluebird's own lethal telepathic will make its final descent into the body of the cult recruiter under interrogation - the razor-sharp spikes protruding from the blackened steel sphere blurring in millionth-of-a-

second counter-clockwise circumambulations as they drilled into pale flesh helpless to resist.

Although the klaxons began to blare and the cult recruiters around her began to flee in terror - abandoning their posts, ceremonial stands bearing goblets, whips and various paraphernalia knocked aside in panic - Astrid could not bring herself to rise into waking consciousness amidst the fugue the remote viewing had brought upon her. The vision of the interrogation and the death by the grisly sphere and its even more grisly operator faded and all turned now to black. The chapel now, mostly vacated, for those few left to see her - in passing - Astrid's eyes drawn back into their sockets and projecting insanity and blindness. She had become the prophetess, though her will did not wish it - so it had come.

A hard, cold wall of grey clouds began to push toward her - Astrid could see them as easily as she could have seen even moments ago the far walls of the chapel. In differentiation however the grey cloud that now pushed toward her was mobile, not static, and encompassed all space from side to farthest side and from the ground unto the very heights of a sky whose uttermost reaches exuded neither paradise nor solace but only horror. Within that grey expanse, running to black in the interior of its broadsides, great, giant faces began to form - mocking, testing, arrayed for terror - present for the purpose of threat. The chief witch amongst them - Bluebird - and her young acolyte - Britta. Now, like vultures they circled. They had taken her sacrifice - deceitfully offered - and now as their forms laughed

through strains of the most subtle gossamer astral filament - heads ten feet tall gleaming in the shining of the gore of the ill-planned victim - they turned their gaze upon her, Astrid.

CHAPTER 40

With a feral snarl Britta landed upon her target, psychopathic in her attack, teeth sinking into the exposed flesh of the cult recruiter held captive in one of the antechambers of Bluebird's personal domicile. Bluebird smiled to herself satanically as she moved forward to rake her claw-tipped fingers across the naked body, hearing its screams as the claws, honed to razor sharpness, opened the flesh almost without effort.

The lines on the skin appeared white on the skin at first, for a few brief seconds, and then appeared to magically separate, blossoming into raw and stinking flesh from which blood began to pour in disturbing rivulets onto the rotting carpet upon the floor.

Smelling the blood, Britta quickly transitioned herself from the bites she had made upon their shared victim's flesh to the more immediate payoff of the flesh inside which her big sister had facilitated in revealing - now to the meat in earnest.

Britta gorged herself as the lifeforce began to gush into her mouth in torrents, dining to excess before ripping her bloodied mouth away to regain her breath before supping further, gore adorning her face - lethal

red upon youthful pale - human flesh still dripping in its terminal anointment clenched betwixt bared teeth animalistic in their sharpness.

So many cult recruiters had been purged on this day, so many perishing under her and her sisters rigorous counter-insurgency program, intelligence unrestrained. A day of bloodshed and great reckoning - a day that would not go unremembered by either side but remembered in infamy most of all by the side that had lost.

For every chess piece moved by the cult recruiters, they, the sisters, had moved thrice. The agents that did penetrate the ranks of the experimental area regime were doubled back - agents became double-agents, double-agents discovered via applied counter-intelligence efforts on behalf of the regime became tripled. Intricate moves of conspiracy churned along decidedly fell courses and those who were not able to be co-opted towards the purposes of the sisters were liquidated whether by the auspices of corrections or via summary execution - the nature and trajectory of the termination being the sisters' own due prerogative.

What a revelation it had been - what a scandal - when Astrid's machinations against Bluebird were discovered. How satisfying it was in the past so recent and how palatable in the here and now the unlocking of every plot, every device of deception - their turning the subterfuge of the cult recruiters upon its head and then raining down upon all their heads in a sense most literal the distilled wrath, terror born forth by their very own teachings in a state of now perpetual revolution.

Students eating the masters. From the seeds of their own blood incest they had created a state monstrosity in their regime - fearful and terrible.

Almost sickeningly did the atrocities perpetrated by Britta and Bluebird serve to facilitate an authority unmatched in those far peripheral areas of the organizational territory, yet the pressure coming from the death goddesses - imbued with the dark blessings of the commandant - proved most efficacious in domination regardless of the extremity of their measures. As the great purge commenced among the cult recruiters - cult brass in their positions for decades watching helplessly as witches possessed of accrued knowledge far beyond their own, repositories of great ancestral wisdom among their sect, were cut down summarily - the authority of many transferred into the authority of a few.

Britta at long last brought herself up from her victim, the trails of blood dripping from her mouth causing spiderweb-like patterns upon her near-naked body, the liquid beading effortlessly off the shining black straps that framed her mostly flat chest onto nipples gently protruding and then across a tight abdomen as it writhed in reaction to its immediate gestation of human blood and human flesh.

Bluebird stood beyond - gore dripping from her razor-sharp claws and red staining the upward portions of the white suit gripping tightly to her skeletal arms resultant from where her claws had caused a blood vessel of the captive to rupture, spurting its life force recklessly skyward toward the grasping limbs of her

predatory form which loomed above during surgical explorations executed by her immediately prior.

Their victim now lay pathetically upon the floor of Bluebird's domicile - mutilated and destroyed - yet, all things being equal, having been given a relatively merciful death in comparison to those who had come recently before. The administrators of the plot as well as the would-be assassin and the would-be assassin's standby had all suffered under the most foul methods of dispatch as devised by the two young death goddesses - the serpent voices of intelligence whispering into their ears suggestions as to means and methods by which their wills might be employed according to their darkest potential.

Among them the black steel spiked sphere, each brutal prong machined to facilitate the most grisly of executions. These were the innovations of the most secret sectors of the engineering center and in an actionable model only possessed by the sisters. The method of their telepathic control only tested by Bluebird herself in the dungeons of the commandant and under her direct supervision as her younger sister, Britta, made her own peregrinations of near future destiny there in nearby caverns with Winzeria. Bluebird was the only one within the organization who had been able to control the device - sans the commandant herself - and as the initial model was tested against the insurgents Bluebird dreamed of future times when many such devices would be at her command, floating disturbingly through her zone - ready to administer terminal punishment as her increasingly shattered consciousness manned them

according to arcane methods of strictly compartmentalized remote viewing. Doom was her watchword and further doom she and Britta would bring in waves upon waves - heaping death upon already festering rot and - through that harsh alchemy - birthing further demons upon the earth, further plague, further calamity and, most overarchingly, further control.

As Bluebird and Britta grinned insanely in their horrific rapture there at the nearby chapel Astrid screamed - her hands drawn up toward eyes now milky white - an all-encompassing and permanent blindness gripping her - save only for the telepathic hallucinations which Bluebird would thereafter choose to transmit - the seeds of schizophrenic madness now come to full black flower as Bluebird's former hidden conspirator became now her creature in all fullness - body, mind and soul. Well over a hundred miles away at headquarters an anomalous blast of lightning issued forth from the heavens near the tower where the commander sat in solitude and, in the dungeons beneath, the sadistic laughter of the commandant echoed through the halls and the cells sprouting forth from the same - the voice of the ultimate nuclear death goddess, always malicious in intent and most severe in discipline, causing all the inhabitants thereof to shudder.

CHAPTER 41

How infinitely pleasurable for her was it to see the small child upon her lap, the latter squirming in protest as the cult recruiter rained down slap after resounding slap upon the bared posterior - the strikes powered by formidable arms, vascular in appearance, blue veins topping tight musculature - sadistic.

Even as he puled in protest, Greta sneered in appreciation and obscene amusement as the little boy's small prick ground against her inner thigh.

This was her own son, facilitated via impregnation by her brother upon her rape of the same, and soon she would accept the seed of her own child, her and her brothers, laid out like a banquet before her now, upon the next completion of the long sophisticated cycles of trauma-induced programming that she and the sisters had been facilitating during the well over half-decade since her spawning.

Greta ceased her punishments and drew her hand to her mouth, extending a willowy finger with sharp-tipped nail betwixt her lips, suckling sensually and languorously, before removing it suddenly and thrusting it into the rectum of her progeny in a violent motion, laughing maniacally as her dilated pupils surveyed the writhing human flesh amidst her familial victim's

screams. Greta's internal vision blurred for a moment only - images within her mind's eye showing complicated grid patterns, glowing blue upon black field - encrypted messages subliminally transferred, coded in such a pattern that only she could decipher.

Aware in fullness there in the now once more, Greta wrenched the little boy from her lap - several fingers now inserted and not withdrawing, grinding even further inward, in fact - repositioning him so that he straddled her, her fingers stretching, probing freely in their molestation.

The smell of the blood pumping through his neck beneath his thin young skin intoxicated her as she manipulated with expert precision the prostate of the young male - grinning in satisfaction to success as she felt his penis enlarge within the very cavity of his own birth, her knuckles slapping against his youthful protruding buttocks as she sodomized him with vicious thrusts and milked from his sexual member - now awakened, for the first time - the life-bearing tincture of a profane, incestuous sexual union.

As the final thrust of her sodomy coerced the last emission of her son's ejaculation Greta knew that the terminal moment had arrived. As her son's body shuddered in its last throes of orgasm she withdrew the three fingers hitherto inserted into his anus - sickly wettened and bearing a distinct fecal stench - extending them toward the thick platinum spike which rested on the stand beside her. Grasping the instrument of death firmly with her other hand she allowed one last fleeting caress upon the still reddened hips that rested upon her

lap. Her son, her nephew, one and the same. She suppressed a smile at her own maudlin, false attempt at human emotion. She would miss him - the molestation, the programming, the punishments - flesh.

Bringing one arm around his back, cradling him, she tilted forward slightly causing the boy's head to rock back upon his neck and then with an insane, inhuman force, she raised the sharpened platinum spike and drove it into the area betwixt his brows with a sickening crunch, smashing through and penetrating the vertical plate.

Blood shot out from the wound as she withdrew the spike with an equally sickening force - the red spray coating Greta's face, highlighting the mania of her visage. Quickly she depressed her pursed sensual lips, the color of raw liver, upon the wound, creating a seal. The integrity of her seal now intact, the method facilitated via long and excruciating internal transfiguration by the cult in order to cultivate select sisters capable of practicing high-tier hematophagia, she eagerly began sucking out the blood, brain fluids and the small dislodged chunks of grey matter. Her breathing and heart rate slowed as her veins enlarged to accept the sudden influx of the child both in solid and liquid form - her throat relaxing, expanding and involuntarily lubricating itself via an internal mechanism as the fluids and organ meat, amply flecked with sharp bone fragments, poured into her in a torrential flow.

As Greta began to absorb the sustenance, eyes rolled back into her head and the whiteness becoming pooled

with disturbing red as the blood continued to pour into her almost without cessation, her consciousness bisected, exploring her own internal processes, and she could feel even now the seed that she had accepted from her son and nephew so very recently sacrificed already melding within her womb, life beginning to take form and shape in a rapidity beyond the natural - further forwarding the incestuous agendas afoot amidst the witch's top echelons. Once she had completed her feeding - the penultimate aspect of the process - the corpse that she had drained would be butchered with expert precision by her most confidential retinue, cult recruiters who she had mentored and cultivated since their most tender days as uninitiated acolytes.

Afterward, as she would, as per her plan, lay in repose in gestation, her young personal retinue in their capacity as butchers would tend to the more grisly aftermath, meticulously so - for failure in attention to detail the most minute would result for them in the administering of Greta's lash in its harshest possible application. The work before the cult recruiters tasked to Greta and her secret installation was performed under conditions demanding the highest tier of exactitude and precision and in such an environment, strict discipline was not only necessary but entirely quintessential. Extracting the bones from the flesh and drawing out fat from the fleshy parts of the body recently the recipient of Greta's impact, the subordinate cult recruiters would work through the night - processing liquids via arcane methods and equipment that had been developed excruciatingly over years and under duress and in secret

at the engineering center by small teams of engineers toiling there in internal exile, never knowing who the recipients of their devices would be within the organization and working only on limited information as to how the full usages of the devices bearing their maker's mark would be applied. After being distilled and enhanced with certain additives the end fluid tincture would be injected into small vials and these, along with parcels containing bone pieces cleaned and bleached, would be handed over to couriers - trusted cult recruiters and a few choice acolytes who would proceed to distribute them to certain sisters across the width and breadth of the cult. Some of them traveling in the black vans to far-flung hives of cultists far beyond organizational territory, some procuring transport with mechanized detachments of internal security and shock troops on their way from the field back to the commander's headquarters - or on their way to the experimental areas. Others still walking on foot through hidden paths in the wilderness, sometimes guided by members of special intelligence for part of their journey, bringing their blasphemous sacraments to lone cult recruiters ensconced in absolute isolation who worked alone and in their assigned isolation unearthing within themselves and on the poisoned earth on which they dwelt the darkest sorceries, forging with a brutal and malignant will the embryos to sift the sands and the stars.

CHAPTER 42

Winzeria stared down at Britta as they made their way further into the tunnel, her charge now more aware of her surroundings than ever after the several minutes that seemed to have passed by in a fugue state - recall of the night stalkers. She wondered if it was Winzeria herself through means occult who had induced the sudden recollection or if there were other, more immediate and more visceral reasons for her mind turning back to those nights of sudden rendition and fell, demonic awakening.

Britta never became privy to the use of the samples that had been withdrawn from her, their purpose. Indeed, in the violence of the ordeal, she never ascertained what exactly the more esoteric functions of what the ordeal encompassed in terms of the night stalkers' own agenda, so very arcane and so very much their own. Unbeknownst to her, a portion of the flesh withdrawn - then suffused with the chemical changes that they themselves had facilitated as well as the chemicals produced by Britta's own processes by dint of her own orgy of flesh - would be fed back to her during the next rendition by the night stalkers, continuing links in an unnatural chain of terror. Doubling then tripling her propensities and taste for human meat and for all methods and activities that would facilitate the spilling

of human blood - torture almighty.

It was the night stalkers who had engineered Britta to become more demonized than all the rest, beyond her would-be peers - an extra layer of intense attention, focused on the very razor's edge of possible experience, that connected the varied threads of her trauma-induced programming in the commandant's training center and then in the dungeons of the commandant herself - causing them to coalesce, bind and take on dimensions far beyond the remotely normative and a totality most profound in its inherent foulness.

Now Britta focused on her surroundings, the dust of the tunnel slowly clearing, the swish of Winzeria's blood-stained robes immediately before her and the sounds of what seemed to be a pathetic crying, very faint yet unmistakeable now without question as they drew closer and ever closer to their intended destination.

A cruel smile seemed to pass across Winzeria's thin lips - so rapid was the gesture that Britta could not discern whether it was real or a trick of the light, for when she looked again Winzeria's visage appeared as it did in its default expression - pinched, severe and possessing an almost singular quality of controlled mania. The tunnel came to a slight curve obscuring what lay beyond, caused either by structural damage incurred in the process of boring through, an earth fall, or via an area of bedrock that had to be worked around by the male slaves wielding their brutal, effective but primitive tools of forced labor.

Winzeria and Britta negotiated the curve and then,

once beyond, they came face-to-face with the source of the whimpering that they had heard before. A serious structural flaw had caused the entirety of the tunnel's passage before them to collapse - the thick red clay now piled without fissure or opening from the floor of the tunnel to the ceiling, yet, with one crucial exception.

Embedded halfway up, the source of the sound - a young boy, one of the forced laborers - trapped in the very act of his only partially successful escape, the majority of the upper part of his body extending outward from the pressurized earth beyond. One arm was pinned to his side, the forearm and hand pinioned in the debris - the other lay limp at his side, broken and useless. Tears streamed down his face, criss-crossing the dust which covered it. His cries for help began anew and then transformed, raised into screams of terror as he saw the two figures before him - knowing well that they meant only harm.

"I shall slit your throat and watch your body bleed," cackled Britta, her lust for human flesh and her propensity for sadism - partly the result of programming and wholly innate - overwhelming all else as she began to move forward.

"No, child," whispered Winzeria. "There is a better way."

The witch reached deep into her robes and withdrew a satchel of mottled, rust-colored leather.

"Observe, child," cooed Winzeria, pleasurably, as she removed from within two black gloves of a similar leather - ample in size and affixed with long, hinged razor-tipped claws extending from each fingertip.

As the male youth trapped and imprisoned within the disturbed earth cried in an even more abject horror as the senior cult recruiter slipped her hands into the instruments of torture - Winzeria casting a sly, satanic glance in his direction - Britta laughed with delight.

While similar in purpose to the cat-like appendages with which Bluebird was equipped, the devices which Winzeria possessed were altogether nastier in both proportion and design according to Britta's estimation. Very long, spindly and razor-sharp, their more grotesque, functional elements shone with a grim and spectral light within the near darkness of the tunnel - promising a torture most arcane.

Winzeria walked toward the boy, overtaking Britta and cautioning her to keep her place as she was now - at least for the time being. Her glance lingered at the tender, puffed nipples of Britta's incipient breasts amidst their crossing of shining black leather - a lust for which she would slake in the by and by - preferably sooner than later.

Cradling one side of the boy's head in the stench of the aged leather of a left-handed glove she shushed the boy gently, as a mother would comfort a child in distress. The tears continued to fall, however the child's cries grew silent - his breathing slowing and regulating in response to Winzeria's matronly attention and via an unstated demand more intensely adamant in requiring acquiescence and obedience delivered by methods occult in nature.

As one hand soothed, the other raised slowly, markedly,

and then, with a methodical precision, fingers splayed according to long premeditated design, the razor sharp metal attached to the glove on her dominant hand drew down. Skin parted and flesh beneath lubricated with blood opened like the unfurling of a blossom. Britta watched with a hideous glee as the flesh was opened and fat droplets began to fall upon the ground, soaking into the subterranean earth. She watched with even more attentiveness as Winzeria carefully manipulated the long razors extending from the thumb and forefinger of the glove, pinching skin and fat and rending it from the face then turning it - holding it aloft - glistening sickly in the dim light.

"Come, child," she commanded Britta and watched with a visceral and indeed sexual delight as Britta moved forward, teeth clenched and bared, cheeks dimpled and eyes shining with the mania in premeditation of the feeding upon human flesh which awaited her.

They played then, the two of them, like carrion birds - the screams of the boy in response to the slashing, the pain overwhelming his hitherto forced silence, tapering off into horrified whimpers the soundtrack of their sport.

Winzeria taunted Britta, lowering the flesh to within the reach of Britta's open and expectant mouth then raising it again - just beyond reach - reveling as she watched the young death goddess flush with pleasure. Winzeria played and Britta responded to each cue with a relish even unexpected by the senior witch - figuring that her programming would will out. Winzeria knew then that even more potential could be brought out in her charge - wrenched to the surface - and that she herself

would avail as the primary sexual imprinter before the young one would be dispatched - wholly weaponized - into the experimental area which awaited her and her slightly older counterpart.

Dangling the first morsel beyond the initial waiting period in response to their now shared revelry, Winzeria finally acquiesced, lowering the bloodied flesh to within reach of Britta's mouth and watching with attention most intense as the small lips slurped down the human meat greedily and with great pleasure.

Mouth now blooded, Britta looked upward toward the witch and saw an incongruous smile - knowing in her child-like way that she had effected the manipulation properly and that many more vistas would await her in the unfolding of a shared relationship - clandestine to the rest of the sisterhood and withheld from even Bluebird herself.

Assuming a visage part pleading and part sullen Britta looked up at the senior cult recruiter, eyes blinking coyly.

"More."

Winzeria turned in a hallucinatory tilt back toward the victim, the lower-half of her blood-drenched garments sweeping circular upon the earthen floor beneath, and raised her gloved hand - sweeping downward and in one fell motion severing the arteries of the boy's neck with such force nearly decapitating the head from the body.

Britta pounced, like an animal, positioning herself beneath the arterial spray - kneeling, buttocks protruded obscenely bisected by the leather thong positioned

betwixt them - rotating lustily upon blood-covered lotus feet as the red anointing of human death covered her.

At that moment Winzeria moved in from behind, lowering herself and wreathing her block robes about Britta's body like black wings unfurled, encircling the young, near-naked body of the little girl who had been subjected to tortures beyond the damned and who in the by and by would bring a damnation beyond reckoning to vast multitudes within the post-apocalyptic landscapes that the organization administered. A beginning for some - and an end to others.

As the pressure of arterial flow began to fail as death drew near for the object of sacrifice, within the blackness of Winzeria's robes Britta, ever hungry and now both highly skilled and highly motivated, bit into the flesh, drawing with inhuman vacuum tension, and Winzeria did likewise, even as the elder's hands, now denuded of their torturous gloves and now provably terminal appendages swept over Britta's naked flesh, squeezing with unrestrained lust upon naked and protruded hind, flittering over breasts still incipient.

From within the black tension of the robes the sounds of gnawing, teeth breaking bone and discovering new horizons of consuming sounded within the confines of the space and the chess pieces moved further still - along a decidedly deadly concourse toward further hell.

CHAPTER 43

Across the landscapes of post-nuclear hell the song echoed along across and through the abandoned homesteads, across field and forest and permeating even into the deepest and darkest of mountain hollers. It was they, the cult recruiters - their lilting voices, sonorous and sorcerous - calling the potential faithful to come.

Waiting - but not for long - for the sparse inhabitants of this particular region to answer their clarion call. A call to purpose, to mission - a call to service in a manner most direct she who was death almighty - she whose name and rank is commandant - rather than to spend a lifetime without end, or the remainder of a lifetime mostly spent already, quivering under the radioactive-bearing shadows that her potency had cast across all the earth. Theirs was an invitation to commune with the very source of their torment.

Some chose to answer the call whilst some chose to shutter away further into an internal madness with which they were already well familiar - the unnatural voices of the cult recruiters causing cold sweat to break upon their bodies, apprehended in a visceral fashion as an inauspicious omen of the highest order.

There were a few holdouts who had seen the cult recruiters before - even if only from a distance - during mutual peregrinations elsewhere and paths nearly crossed in times prior. A few of the oldest among them recalled these occasions with dread and disgust - their perception of the cult recruiters and their object of fanatic devotion being tinged with the old thinking, the incorrect thinking which in its futility sought to deny the infernal glory of the nuclear holocaust and its personification. While the older among the ragged and anarchic generations of survivors wheezed their cautionary warnings with wagging finger and the sense of erroneous authority based on age alone, those younger, those whose sense of anything other than nuclear hell was less than a shadowy filament of a dream, discerned in the invitation of the cult recruiters a dark promise.

Standing upon a lonely knoll bereft of trees, the woods and ramshackle settlements far below her, one of the senior witches smiled as she heard through the enchanted songs of her fellow sisters the sound of conflict and murder. The sounds of a child reacting to the invitation of the emissaries of the commandant - the sounds of parents and elders issuing reproach, words of forbidding and words of warning - then the sounds of murder. A crude farming implement for the slash-and-burn grasped in young hands, the will controlling them fortified by the cult recruiters' own black spells, then the sounds of blunt wood or sharpened steel impacting into flesh still in shock as they met their demise in that their own progeny would rebel against them so strongly and

with such terminal determination.

These were the means and methods by which the cult recruiters played out their Bremen-esque games in the lands on the periphery of the commander's organizational borders - beyond the proper borders, just so, yet not in the vicinity of the experimental area, still incipient. The efforts of the highest-tier devotees of the commandant in the here and now was procurement - facilitation - to bring forth to the occasion of the commandant's appearance at the rally, marking a new era of hell, her children - as all were - and in great numbers. To sate - even for a time - her appetites, limitless though they were - to feed unto levels of inhumane gluttony the ever-blazing furnaces of her cruelty, her sadism without limits.

Meanwhile, back at the commander's headquarters, from inside the depths of the dungeons beneath the commandant's training center an atmosphere of impending doom seeped silently but palpably throughout the immediate region at the heart of the regime - constantly shifting and expanding in premeditation of the coming rally. All domiciled there on the grounds of the former penitentiary could feel the shift even if their apprehension failed to readily ascertain the cause of the same. Those devout however - from the seasoned cult recruiters and nascent acolytes still awaiting initiatory rites sealing them irrevocably to the nuclear death goddess, to the abducted children toiling in the training center and the far greater number of more normative organization personnel who propitiated the commandant in private devotions in their cells and

barracks - all could feel the foul touch of their patron then and there - upon them and upon the land.

Only a week separated the faithful from the most blackly sacred occasion ever to occur in the history of the cult - the appearance of the commandant in the flesh - a herald, a sign, a warning, and then, one week more thereafter, the march forward to the border and all the horror that would then proceed.

Beyond the concertina wire borders of headquarters proper, in the field that had been prepared for the rally stood a small number of shock troops in the process of making their way back to the perimeter after many long hours of hard labor preparing temporary infrastructure for the express occasion of the rally. They stood, male and female alike, each set of eyes transfixed to the night sky above.

Among the latter, a rangy soldier of some twenty-odd years allowed a sharp hiss to escape her mouth, shoulder-length black hair sticking to her face from the sweat of her day's endeavors, a thin-membered yet brutally calloused hand fingering the curved, blood-encrusted blade strapped to her thigh which she used frequently on herself and sometimes on others as well, both willing and unwilling alike, in the service of her devotion to the commandant.

Within the former among their number stood a male youth of seventeen, muscled chest bared to the winter elements and bearing upon such flesh the ragged criss-crossing of multiple lacerations, some delivered in the concourse of combat and some occasioned in more private environs by the very blade and hands of the

black-haired member of his unit who stood nearby. His hands clenched and unclenched themselves rapidly as his eyes too stared into the distance and upward - pitch black clouds churning violently superimposed upon a field of ugly and listless grey.

All of the shock troops there in the small assembly bore crude tattoos marking them as adherents of the commandant's cult - mushroom clouds bearing insane and deranged faces, myriad explicit scenes of gleeful torture and killing of innocents as well as strange abstract symbols which were believed to channel the bleak energies of nuclear death personified.

As they stared into the night sky they could feel those markings burning and pulsating as above the strange clouds continued their bizarre turnings.

As the female shock trooper had labored during the earlier afternoon, sweat dripping down her brow as she dug trenches under the dangerous and highly ultraviolet rays of the sun above, she had felt a pain wrench through her on her right side - coming on suddenly and so violently that she had doubled over. As the sharp piercing sensation retreated into a dull throb she straightened herself, aware that her body had suddenly come beneath a shadow that came and then receded along an interval pattern. Staring upward she saw them - huge, black vultures circling in counter-clockwise fashion, casting the darkness of their outstretched, stinking blood-flecked wings upon not the dead but the living.

From the cult recruiters on the periphery on their missions of procurement, to the shock troops building

the infrastructure of terror itself and even among those young ones - those recently procured - the females among their number exchanging their rotted garments for the black robes of the acolyte - all were aware that time was shifting in a fashion most unnatural. Not only were they individually being taken in hand by dark forces entirely outside of their control, but the earth itself and the laws that governed it, ungovernable as the scorched earth seemed at times, were being changed - manipulated. Increasingly there was the palpable sense that reality itself was becoming a shimmering miasma, a hallucination with a handler most dread at the helm and the land itself a liminal space bereft of even the semblance of natural progression - a sense that anything could happen.

The female shock trooper remembered now in total recall the vultures circling above and so closely in the late afternoon, remembering the unmistakeable feeling of those flecks of stale blood from their rot-covered wings raining down on her upturned face - gently caressing her in a blasphemous anointing. She recalled the tears that had come to her eyes without conscious volition, fracturing her vision like a broken mirror, and the sight of the walls of the commander's headquarters beyond - the razor-tipped concertina wire shimmering underneath the rays of that aging sun above them, most horrible, seeming to stretch limitless in all directions. Now that night had fallen the razor wire still shined brightly - illuminated and visible for miles by the anti-aircraft lights that had been requisitioned from the old military bases, now overgrown and crumbling, a sign of

the commander's unbridled hubris and uncanny penchant and ability to control and possess.

Each of the shock troopers' eyes were now transfixed to the night sky - each sharing the same vision: the clouds churning violently, separating then merging, swirling at some disturbance of an occult nature that none of them could readily ascertain. Each saw in the periphery of their sight the distant secure perimeter of the commander's headquarters and each saw in varying stages of advance that razor-wire encircling not only the commander's headquarters but the whole totality of the planet. From the iron clouds above them a precipitation began to fall - not water but blood and intermingled therein flesh, chopped and still bleeding. Far beyond upon the black horizon where the curvature of the earth was blatantly visible they saw falling stars - one at first, then several - then dozens, hundreds - thousands. The deathly sickle that had once descended, more than seventy years past, was descending once again and who could withstand what was to come when nuclear holocaust presented itself, herself, not shrouded in the concealment of generals hell-bent on destruction but there in fullness, in a form most personal, in the host of those so fanatically committed to the fulfillment of her will?

CHAPTER 44

Britta snarled in maniacal bloodlust as she leapt upon the coterie of witches standing before the gates of the newly opened regional command center for the experimental region - now the black heart of Bluebird's and Britta's shared regime.

Mostly naked under the cold winter daylight - her small and muscled buttocks well-scarred with the implements of unholy punishment and bifurcated with an obscene black and shining garment, her prepubescent chest covered in a criss-cross fashion with leather straps of a similar make - the child death goddess tore with teeth into vein-bearing throat and ripped into bodily cavities most resilient with hands that bore an altogether inhuman strength.

The blood of witch after witch sprayed upward into the cold winter air and, despite their nearly incomprehensible power, they were not able to restrain nor even slow the grisly progress of what had once been the spawn of their own programming - or so they thought.

From atop the thick black walled compound of regional command, behind thick and horrific razor wire barriers, members of her and Bluebird's personal retinues watched with grim amusement behind their

black goggles and balaclavas the scene unfolding below - every filament of the localized government there in import and appearance bearing the unmistakeable marks of the commandant's programming and the good graces of the commander - with all manner of death-dealing weapons and mechanisms of destruction being made available to them.

The iron gates of regional command opened with a grinding screech and there upon a steel-rail driven vehicle stood Bluebird - the horrible empress of a horrible land. The armored carrier was painted entirely in thick flat black and various instruments of torture as well as armaments and lethal machine guns hung and protruded from the myriad rivet-affixed portholes and shining platinum hooks and prongs thereupon.

And, upon the front of the carrier, there as the ultimately blasphemous of her ornaments, were Nadezhda and Bonn - now sustained in their half-life by arcane methods beyond any previously conceived of ethical transgression of medical application - the forward beacon of the sabotage and replacement campaign as it related to the bloodlining programs of the cult recruiters - their machinations in abusive reproduction now inhabited by those under the death goddesses' command - agendas most black replaced with agendas blacker still.

How many had died at the hands of the young death goddesses of the experimental areas, both via personal dispatch and on direct order - executions carried out by their emissaries? How many now languished in the most bleak conditions in the underground cells which were now beginning to dot the landscape of the new

authoritarian sub-regime, how many yet still to face interrogation, imprisonment and then death or worse at the hands of the sisters' own burgeoning secret police?

All were pools of blood feeding into the rivulets and rivers most fell, clogged with viscera and choked with flesh harvested by means most grim, flowing onward to provide those individual, collective currents which would feed into and stimulate the ocean of blood herself - she who was the commandant - the bleak capstone of all that was and embodied apocalypse, possessing hate beyond all possible hate, the personification of the most outer regions of darkness burst upon the earth planet in the most destructive weaponized form.

All along the banks of these rivers of gore knew her name and knew - like the death goddesses themselves, and like their emissaries - that the new dark age was upon the land. Some among them had considered that the immediate aftermath of the nuclear holocaust had commenced the beginning of the end - while some among the organization believed that the very act of mutually assured destruction realized itself was the beginning of the dark age. How wrong they were.

The seventy-plus years since the nuclear wars, under the strict guidance of the organization and the dual dictators at their helm was but the period of cleansing - the latterly cleansing - purge upon purge upon purge - that most necessary but altogether more tedious honing, refining and manipulating the inherent nature of the globe and those who still dwelt there - albeit in a microcosm - following the great dislodging that the nuclear wars had

effected.

Where the old instruments of terror of the times before had imploded suicidally upon themselves and upon their wielders, the field suddenly and violently barren had become ripe for the sowing of new instruments of terror - new ideations of a totalitarian model altogether more severe and refined in that unmistakably infernal refiner's fire of twenty-megaton atomic bombs, then perfected in the harsh alchemical alembic that the immediate aftermath of nuclear war had afforded.

The diplomacy, albeit titular, of the old times had become a distant dream and now the only dreams that could be realized were the nightmares born in the darkest recesses of the minds of the emerging psychopathic gods of the clandestine organization and applied with a methodology of unbridled terror bereft of even the semblance of morality and humanity as it was once known. Indeed, as observation of the experimental area as it now stood attested to, the very makeup of the populace - the tenacious conscious life that found themselves, after the nuclear wars, on the other side of the veil of the abyss - was being shifted in a fashion that stretched the bounds of the imagination and then moved even further still.

Surrounding Bluebird's armored carrier were a half-dozen children - more female than male and still tender in age but greatly advanced in consciousness and hardened in constitution. These were the spawn of the death goddesses' pets - Nadezhda and Bonn - their conception and birth facilitated by the black arts of the

highest tiers of intelligence and the maniacal sciences of the engineers under the guidance of the organization at its highest levels. Like the legends of the old world in which two came forth from hidden places after apocalypse and catastrophe unbound to repopulate a land altogether changed, the progeny of the two chosen ones - reduced to a slavery beyond cruel - were to be the razor-point of the spearhead - the master class.

Like vipers, these progeny carried within their very physiological makeup the poisons of the chemical and radiological warheads which had rained down like fire from on high upon the experimental region - the humans who had once inhabited the thin border strip on the periphery of the commander's organizational territory reduced to withering husks and most now gone - their memories nothing more than soot stains upon the grim bureaucratic buildings of the sisters' regime as a result of the burning bodies that had piled high across the region and burned incessantly in the weeks and months directly after the campaign. Those among that former demographic which remained, enslaved, the playthings of a regime whose only overt propensity was that of bleak sadism - the layered agendas that prompted such activities being ever whispered with venomous tongue by the commandant herself to the eager ears of the death goddesses who now found themselves lifted up from obscurity to the very heights of the organization's despotic power.

Howls erupted from the gathered inhabitants of the experimental area who had amassed outside the gates -

screams of lust, horror and revelation combined into a roar that seemed to shake the very foundations of the ground upon which they stood. Their terror, their aspirations, so transient and so controllable by the will of the regime, transforming and coalescing into that fanaticism most dangerous and fell which was the bedrock of the organization - their blood the oil which churned the gears of death facilitating their collective further descent into hell on earth.

The demographics present represented a cross-section of the populace who now dwelt upon the scorched and poisoned landscape - scorched once in the nuclear wars and then poisoned and scorched once again long after that first and most terrible nuclear winter by the chemical and radiological weapons of the organization which had been dredged up from the blueprints of the sharpest yet also most perverse minds of the era before - the seeds of their errant wisdom blooming once more into the full flower of destructive potential actualized upon the fleshly canvas of humankind.

Among the remnant who had once been the sole occupants of the region - the so-called sovereigns - it was the members of the fifth column acting on behalf of the organization and its martial forces - the informants, the agent saboteurs - who now held the most immediate strings of control upon the less fortunate of their former fellow-citizens. Their degree of enthusiasm and propensity for excess in molding those who once held them in trust was much like others who had been turned in titular similar circumstances from history - for they

had been the hidden mechanisms in the secret war that had been waging for long before the overt martial campaign came into play.

Now denuded of their need for subterfuge and cover they lorded their enhanced position over the others amongst the remnant with a level of horror not altogether unsurprising, for their position now was the long-awaited paradise, albeit black, for which they had yearned and strove for under the harshest of conditions for many years prior - separate from the organization at large by mission - their devotion and loyalty clandestine by necessity.

The appearance of these former fifth columnists, now privileged administrators - for they among all others knew the landscape and the former haphazard governance of the same more beyond all else - characterized the careening zeal which not even the intelligence analysts among the organization had premeditated.

Men who had once been seen and apprehended among their former peers as docile and retiring - bearded uncles, medium-tier among the old councils - bodies aged beyond their years via dint of the often near starvation conditions of the sovereign territory and mouths which had always spouted the most conservative positions in regard to lifestyle and defense (the latter, fed to them by their covert handlers) now stood in glory, barely recognizable.

Many of those whose faces had once been covered in lice-ridden matted locks now stood with faces and heads shaved to the skin as a sign of their obsessive and

inveterate loyalty to Britta, in a specificity of primary cult adherence which was broadly encouraged. Bodies once bent and wracked with malnutrition stood erect with new layers of lean, rippling muscle due to their new, elite diets of human flesh and rendered corpse-product. Once covered in little more than dry-rotted rags, these newly empowered frames now found themselves attired in the new black uniforms which they had been issued - adorned with grisly badges commensurate to their particular desires and factional adherences within the organization.

Eyes once milky, downcast and defeated stared forward now, wide and fixed glares emanating the questionable potency of speed-induced mania - their brain chemistry and subsequently their consciousness changed by the myriad levels and varieties of narcotics now supplied to them by the organization - causing awakening sensations and revelations of insight within them to which they had never before been exposed and never known.

Britta herself, now covered in copious gore from her assault, moved away from the crumpled dead bodies of the witches whom had been the recipients of her recent and lethal attentiveness - their black robes soaked in blood, torn throats revealing interior flesh, hot and steaming - and moved toward the rail-driven armored carrier upon which was pursed in foremost position her sister, Bluebird - bird-like - blood-drinker.

With a few brief movements Britta caught up to and then ascended the carrier amidst its slow forward motion - her blood-stained bald crown shining sickly in the

wintry light - the added nakedness of young body as legs crossed in climbing motion bisecting the fabric of the filth-encrusted thong betwixt her buttocks, entering further still between and exposing all the more flesh most supple, causing her cultists to hiss and snarl in appreciation for the great dispensation which had been afforded them.

Her devotees in particular were many amongst the crowd - for she had worked the demographics of the remnant, chosen and slave alike, most incessantly once the push toward the eradication of the cult recruiters' chapels had commenced in earnest. Many of the those fifth columnists knew her intimately, having had the pleasure to kill at her command - being given sights, demonstrable, of her penchant for torture from close distance. Some select few and most elect had tasted the pleasure that her flesh would give - even as they suffered under her touch.

As she now perched atop the armored carrier, though not standing like her sister but instead crouched - her feet planted firmly on the thick steel platform, hind protruded, palms rested alternately upon the surface of the deck itself or upon her bent knees - she scoured the faces of the first wave of the crowd, surveillance prorated for her faithful.

There was one - one who once had assumed the posture of a rigidly loyal if not slothful elder of the sovereigns. A little less than six feet in height before the arrival of the organization, he now stood to his actual stature - well above - blank glaze replacing former feigned concern - shining greasy black automatic assault

rifle cradled in the crook of an arm which had once only held crude agrarian instruments for ill-fated endeavors which had yielded less than desirable harvest. His metal teeth now glinted in the daylight - a small dispensation which Britta had afforded him, via the auspices of the organizational surgeons, so that he too could - in a lesser degree - enjoy the predatory pastimes of the little death goddess who was now his life and soul.

She caught his gaze and felt a sudden stillness in the wind as the air of his breathing caught in his throat - he knew that his aspirations had been realized and that much more would await him here in the nightmare land that his mistress had groomed and would groom even further still - her zone, her terror, her tears upon each face which had been and would be crushed by the totalitarian booted feet of her presence in the regime. She had confirmed her ownership of him by sight and by telepathic command and he was now hers in service - for he knew well what amoral pleasures, excesses and blasphemy that service as such would entail.

On the other side of the crowd stood a woman - nearly as enormous in height as her fellow traveler but much more so in both girth and constitution alike than the former. Although her body was cloaked in the black robes of a cult recruiter, her demeanor was altogether different, even though she displayed and demonstrated exactly the sort of internal biological programming that indicated a commandant's cultist of the highest tier.

A young woman in her late teenage years, once formidable during her clandestine time as a fifth

columnist, in a matter of a few short months she had become a behemoth - an object of great terror among all those who had inhabited the regional area prior to the campaign by dint of her dramatic transformation alone.

She had been invited to the secret meetings - the comparative black sabbaths of the cult recruiters in the dead of night once their arrival in the area - privy to the most sophisticated, secretive and dreadfully powerful mechanisms and methods of the top echelon cult recruiters stationed there - even as she had spied against them on behest of Britta personally and via proxy through the auspices of intelligence loyal to her regime and the zone alone. Over time she had worked both as fifth columnist - a recruit of the initial wave of cult recruiters in the area and thusly into the commandant's cult itself as the cult recruiters administered it - as well as acting as a spy from the onset for the zone, the regime and the death goddesses.

All to gain and little to lose, this prodigious amongst the organization's espionage apparatus on the ground had by dint of timing, desire and propensity found herself the recipient of the benefit of practices most arcane. Many of her erstwhile teachers, cult recruiters liquidated in the purges, now only a memory, their corpses whitening and drying under dead sun, expressions turned back in that indescribable rictus of death as their former student - and ultimate of the traitors amongst their direct administration - swelled in power afforded by their knowledge and wisdom - disclosed in deception, and tripled by dint of ancillary techniques bequeathed to her by the death goddesses

themselves.

In her gargantuan hands she clasped a ball of twisted steel which extended in five lengths of heavy hauling chain across the area several feet in front and to the sides of her - upon the end of each of which was set heavy steel collars shining with platinum finish, securely locked onto the necks of five slaves, entirely unclothed and shivering in exposure to the south winter air.

Naked and covered in angry red weals across almost every conceivable part of their exposed flesh, raised and some bleeding, they looked with frightened gazes of servitude and terror not upon the armored carrier which rolled by them - not upon the preternatural children who marched in its van - but instead upon the quivering black whip which their immediate overseer held clasped in her other hand, black plastic injected with a further chemical substance within, its near-tapered point quivering and pointed toward the sky, its steel-rod fortified grip held within a dominant fist whose only purpose and desire was to punish.

CHAPTER 45

Her beating went on longer than she thought humanly possible as her exposed buttocks turned from an angry red then marbled into black and purple bruises and this - as of yet - only effected by dint of the flat of the cult recruiter's outstretched hand alone, formidable and dire in purpose and exceedingly cruel in consequence. She premeditated that much worse instruments were soon in store for her before this one day amidst the time of the late winter progressed from its dull and shrouded afternoon to the soon to come era of twilight.

Her own hands splayed and planted upon the ground, body draped ignominiously over the lap of her punitive handler, the latter herself only a few years older, she stared fixedly into the image which ran the length of floor to ceiling in the small faux wood paneled room - the white-sheathed likeness of Bluebird - leather nursery strap affixed upon utility belt circling her wasp-like waist hanging threateningly, gleaming - startlingly present and beyond photo-realistic in apprehension.

She was one of the elect, the specially selected - one of the children of the fifth columnists that had been surged into a program commensurate to the loyalty of

her parentage and aware like the hydra it was of the inherent potential which lay within her and others like her - both within the tenderness of flesh itself and the twisted, careening tunnels of the mind which would be accessed - all things due and proper - intruded upon, severely, via the dreadful techniques of the cult recruiters now stationed in the experimental region.

These cult recruiters were different than the ones who had come before them - the new breed, as it were - sanctioned only by the dual agreement of Bluebird and Britta both in conjunction with the recommendation from organizational headquarters. Gone in the border zone at least were the cult chapels - incipient projects now in ruins - the cult recruiter loyalists operating instead within unmarked rooms at the ends of long hallways amidst the central building of regional command itself.

Of course, those new layers of intrigue that might be present and most assuredly were - cult recruiters from headquarters operating in disguise, as well as their agents - of this fact both of the death goddesses were well aware. Despite the purges of the regime in the borderlands the chapel on the direct periphery of the commander's headquarters stood still, a stronghold of the headquarter's hardcore - unencumbered and unabashed.

Yet, insofar as the public face of the commandant's cult was concerned, here - and what went on via such auspices was extensive indeed, localized and on the ground - the recent influx, the demographic of the influx that was apparent at least, were sisters who now acted

with the good graces of the young dictators of the new organizational area.

If their agendas were not altogether equanimous in purpose overall to that of the sisters, at the very least a parallel in thrust and execution existed.

The naked female form sprawled over the lap of the robed cult recruiter in humiliating exposure before the blasphemously devotional and idolatrous image of Bluebird writhed only cursorily despite the severity of the beating, for she had weeks before been implanted with a device by another subsect of the death goddesses' intelligence services - the various doings and dealings among that stratum now inhabiting the experimental region tightly compartmentalized - very few knowing the full lay of the land, as the case may be.

Still the afternoon sun - overcast as it was by the intermittent and differential tendency of the winter - held fast in the western sky. The cult recruiter who now held her within check had not moved to the more onerous instruments of punishment which were always afforded to her - wooden paddle, leather strap and metal cane - though the girl knew that these were soon to come as assuredly as the setting of the sun would bring about a long winter night and all that might entail, present and looming.

Visions of a time before entered into her mind's eye - seemingly unbidden - the sounds of the cult recruiter's unnaturally strong hand raining down smack upon resounding smack upon her increasingly ruined naked flesh becoming more dim in her audible apprehension

and then disappearing altogether as her eyes rolled back into her head, exposing only the whites, eyelids fluttering, as her consciousness retracted upon itself - receiving the telepathic vision decided upon well beforehand by her cult recruiter handlers and - by the nature of the current chain of authority - by no less than Bluebird herself.

She saw the high towers of the commander's headquarters and upon one such tower she saw the commander himself - shaking in a rage most unnatural - muscular body covered entirely by tactical garments and every form of lethal weaponry and ordnance attached upon carabiner-equipped straps and devices - one fist set upon grotesquely muscular arm extended toward the heavens from which black and grey smoky clouds emitted continual lightning of a sort never before seen and never to be seen again.

She knew that she herself had once come from those regions - though missing the mark for physical presence at the event which she now saw in stark relief within her internal vision. At some point she remembered as a very young child meeting with members of a special intelligence unit along with her parents in a secluded, forested area beyond which could be seen the gleaming concertina wire barriers marking the commander's headquarters and beneath - unseen but implicitly understood to be present - the dungeons of the commandant herself. Had this in fact been her point of origin or instead simply the arena of her parents' conspiracy?

The abuse which she had suffered in those days after

- the passage of time often languid and uneventful in the ebb and tide of bare subsistence survival in the once sovereign area - was subdued, if not non-existent altogether. The stressors which affected the more elder among their number were unbound - understandable even by the sole factor of their very tenuous hold on maintaining their continued life on a landscape far from fertile - but were not so much felt by her - her own neural pathways spinning along threads still fantastical and wondrous, albeit dark. For the wonder and fantasy of post-nuclear hell was the only fantasy and wonder she had even known, until it too was accelerated.

Barely cognizant of her surroundings, the young progeny of the fifth columnists felt herself being lifted from the lap of the cult recruiter, her vision of the commander's appearance at the rally before the martial campaign into what was now termed the experimental area becoming fractured like glass shattering upon pavement, irrevocably so - a glimpse into a suspect unreality shimmering and then dissipating by the more immediate and demanding situation in which she now found herself.

Corpse-pale stars now shimmered in the sky seen from the sole window - indicating not only that the long afternoon was over but that she had been inhabiting a vision-state throughout the concourse of the albeit short twilight and had only come to waking consciousness once inhabiting night proper. Cold goose-flesh erupted on her skin as she felt herself manipulated into standing position - the life-size image of Bluebird now to her left

and seeming to emanate a questioning, interrogative posture very much in line with the circumstances which the girl now inhabited.

Beyond conception - beyond reason - this was the mood of the room in which the girl was now bent over at the waist - naked flesh exposed inclusive of sex - before the incessant whipping of black-stained supple leather strap commenced, bringing her to states in which the most dangerous of insights were now made available to her in great and horrible profusion - the quintessence of what was discipline in all its vagaries of meaning and import emblazoned upon her flesh in the most brutally tactile of measures.

She struggled to stand tall figuratively - or at least, maintain position, amidst the continuous falls of the thick leather strap, but she felt herself crumbling - physical stress feeding into psychological breakdown. Psychological breakdown leading into a state in which her grasp on reality was tenuous at best. The cult recruiter - one of the new variety, no less - was also well aware of the changes taking place in her charge and as such she edited her tactics accordingly - though flowing along the course of the same and one and only stratagem which had been advised to her by her superiors the night before the young child had been transferred to her temporary and intensive custody. A change in nuance only, but not in import, neither in term.

The little girl felt herself being pushed upon the ground, shoulders at the lead and then frame roughly manipulated so that she now faced the propaganda image of Bluebird in full frontal presage once again -

eyes transfixed upon the rendering of her sadistic white boots as she felt the fingers of the cult recruiter enter into her, raping both available orifices and singing in a soft, lilting voice an honorific homage to the mistress of chemical death. The harbinger of an entirely non-consensual acquiescence of an entire people, a land on the border of two lands, a place whose history before her arrival would be but a passing phantasmagoria - unremembered, suppressed and forgotten - in the horrific legend which the organization would now build.

Sleep upon drowsy eye for both cult recruiter and tortured alike the two girls, one child, one youth, drifted into an uncomfortable slumber as the cold stars of ever-present hell shined above them - carrying secrets yet to be revealed in a land in which only the insane would wish to inhabit. As she drifted into fitful slumber the daughter of the fifth columnists heard the words once again, ringing in her ears, whispered according to the tune which the cult recruiter had delivered just before:

Blood splattering upon already blood-splattered ground
It is the secret which I wish to reveal to you, unveil to you.

Fellow-traveler, companion, conspirator within the confines of these iron gates which hold within them layers of subterfuge, conspiracy and intrigue unknown - walk with me further...

She could not conceive of the amount of time in which her mind drifted in slumber, however when she awoke she saw that the cult recruiter was no longer asleep and

she herself no longer alone, for other black-robed forms crowded about the naked figure upon the ground, she herself - their individual faces concealed by the long shadows which worked and moved about the room appearing to be as conscious as the shadow-like figures which stood amidst their obscuring darkness, for night still reigned in the experimental area and would for some hours still.

One of the cult recruiters turned toward the young one who had administered her earlier punishment and programming, this one the only face which the young spawn of the fifth columnists could make out.

"She is not yet blooded," the faceless cult recruiter croaked. "Rectify that, for the hour grows late."

"Exceedingly so," croaked another, in agreement.

A long wooden bench, rough-hewn and strong beyond measure, fashioned out of the hardwoods of the surrounding forests, was dragged by several of the cult recruiters before the image of Bluebird so that it was situated lengthwise extending out from the position of that visual focal point which was itself a very necessary component of the ordeal. The child of the fifth columnists was lifted up from the floor, limp from punishment already received, out from the dream and vision and into the disorientation of a disturbing and fitful sleep suddenly interrupted and placed face-down upon the bench, head jutting forward so that image of Bluebird could be seen by her should the cult recruiters so wish it.

As the taut abdomen of the girl was laid to rest upon

the splintered wood of the rough surface the cult recruiters went about their preparatory work - her legs extended yet still bent to be restrained upon the legs of the bench at the far end with stainless steel leg irons. Her hands stretched forward over the lip of the bench and rendered immobile by swiveled cuffs of a similar make. Finally, a thick leather restraint belt was encircled about her waist and the bench itself, cinched tightly so that the little girl's posterior thrust out obscenely and her trunk was rendered entirely rigid - trussed up and helpless for whatever her tormentors might have in store.

From the largest among the cult recruiters a strange sucking sound became instantly apparent within seconds of the initial preparations being effected - audibly indicating a readiness for feeding upon blood and flesh as thick lips drew inward with intake and then exhaled with equally heavy breath in increasing frequency - a signal that the terminal point of the hunt was now within grasp.

Another among the cult recruiters hissed a warning and the larger one withdrew into the shadows, situating herself with tasks equal to the present mission - this one was not for her.

The little fifth columnist began to hear another sound which she had never heard, though the one that had become immediately before had filled her with dread most profound, as she had past seen the predatory physical motions which she correctly imagined accompanied such a sound before, though not close enough in the crowds outside of regional command to

hear the dreadful one who she had spied across from. Fearfully now she waited in her bondage, no promise for her insofar as her knowing that the threat which had been stayed for a time would not be reinstated and executed later.

Now distinct from the prior, what she ascertained presently was a strange crackling noise - like a small generator coming to life, accompanied with a burnt whiff of something foul - like burning wires or an organizational carrier in the first lurching motions of forward progress. Beyond her, out of sight, Cora Beth smiled as she manipulated the circular device set upon a long cane-like whip constructed of metal - cane-like in its design and intended application yet entirely more severe. With a long, thin, pale finger she turned up the dial affixed to the implement's rubberized handle, increasing the electrical charge which crackled in blue sparks along the length and thickness of the coiled extent of the instrument, hers to wield on this night at it would be hers to wield on many similar nights hereafter - applied to the naked flesh of those who were her charges tenderized and acclimated, to a degree, beforehand, by her lessers.

Cora was aware of her own malignancy and thrilled in the remembrance of the wayward and convoluted path which had brought her to her present state of service to the commandant and to the regime - a path as tedious and excruciating as the sudden push into the unknown unto which her present charge would soon be thrust.

A temporal vehicle, a messenger.

All within their group hoped that the transmission sent would be received, however there was small chance that the one who relayed it would ever be recovered. This the little daughter of the fifth columnists did not realize in full but in her accrued wisdom over the long, exacting months Cora Beth could premeditate that she knew, at least to a measure.

The room now shone dimly with the illumination of a single bar of sodium light affixed upon the ceiling of the paneled interior suddenly activated - once part of a larger bank of lights facilitating the drab bureaucratic work that had gone on there long ago and now the lone survivor as it were, powered by a series of generators whirring unheard many hallways away in one of the maintenance areas of regional command - supplying just enough clarity of vision for the cult recruiters to go about their work in earnest without compromising the nature of the darkness which encircled them from without.

In one corner huddled against where two walls joined together sat Astrid - cross-legged, her hood pulled partially back exposing the grey orbs of blind eyes which now augured in their perpetual lack of vision the potential for success or absence thereof which the dawn might bring. Her internal awareness stretched outward, probing, past the barrier that marked the beginning of the poisoned forest wherein dwelt only death - doom for humans, yet in its strangeness and unnatural properties a breeding ground for something altogether new and terrifying in nature and import.

Once only primitive markers prohibiting the forward movement of organizational personnel into the area, even as the corpses began to pile up, the barrier was now a border in proper and in earnest - long lines of timber pinioned into the earth at intervals and betwixt them coils of lethal razor wire, barbed wire, metal fencing and whatever else the new regime could acquire and cobble together from various sources. While the improvements had managed to stem for the most part the flow of inherently rebellious organizational members from making spontaneous forays into that vast woodland which extended into an unexplored wilderness beyond - shock troops being the main transgressors, impelled to such ventures by their own more than transgressive appetites - Astrid knew that little would stem the tide of what lay beyond making incursion into the developed area of the experimental zone by that which dwelt there, should those dark forces wish, whatever sort of demarcation the sisters might put into play.

Her hands curled into claws and her neck craned disturbingly, the lids upon silver blind eyes peeling back even further as she heard the first lash of the whip upon naked flesh - a thin line of drool dripping down one twitching corner of her mouth as Astrid imagined the scenes which she would never see again - such sights and engagements which were the dangle by entrenched provocations present within her direct associates before and the mechanism of deception by which she found her onetime enemies now as her direct handlers.

The electrical-powered metal cane raised high into the air and then crashed with a whirring, crackling

electrical charge and, as it met its intended point of impact, the small room erupted in shrill, ululating screams as the high-voltage instrument connected with bare exposed flesh, since wettened and slathered with a clear viscous liquid during the course of the cult recruiters ordeal preparations to further facilitate current in the victim. As the electrified metal rested briefly upon the naked posterior of the child the smell of burning flesh became instantly apparent. Cora Beth snorted and grinned as she saw the external flesh begin to blacken and then melt upon the screaming little girl's upturned buttocks even as Astrid grinned, platinum eyes turning to and fro like a cursed oracle, sniffing the air - ears peeled for another hint of torture.

Cora Beth's arms raised again and again above her head, the dial on the mechanism controlling the flow of electricity now set at full tilt, the bar of light above them dimming each time the metal cane met naked flesh as the device pulled nearly more localized current than the generators could handle from the thick cord that ran from the base of the rubberized handle to the ancient socket upon the far wall. As the high-pitched screams of anguish reached horrific proportions, the first witch which had tended the child throughout the afternoon and twilight hours moved forward, grasping a handful of stringy blonde hair and yanking her head upward so that their charge faced the image of Bluebird full-on. The cult recruiter admired the tender face, wettened with tears, reddened with distress and contorted in pain. Astrid in her place in the corner could smell the salty

tears and thrummed with lust as the beating continued apace, until blood ran down the girl's buttocks and legs, pooling upon the floor, and the swish of the cane flung splatters of gore upward, staining the bar of light above them and casting the room in an inauspicious sanguine brilliance.

Cora Beth muted the current running to the cane briefly, with a single push of a rubberized button the shape of a half-sphere near the top of the handle. The lights above the scene sputtered and then resumed, somewhat brighter, as Cora extended the tip of the cane to depress lightly upon the upper-left hind of her victim, just below the leather correctional restraint belt, where the girl's buttocks, slightly stretched open by the width of the rough wooden bench, arched dramatically. Drawing the tip of the metal implement down further, across the lascivious arch - down the charred, bloodied and ruined skin. The slightest touch there made the young girl howl in abject despair, screaming as the metal tip raked down skin which came off black and crisped like a breaking carapace of ash to reveal red, hot flesh beneath. Down along the crease which marked the demarcation between backside and leg Cora Beth skimmed the metal down on the interior of the thigh and then pulled back.

Black mark of the sadistic engineers, in fact a very elite sign of the personal attentions of the engineer himself, the small black widow shone darkly in gleaming contrast upon her white flesh. This was the insignia indicating, among other things, that special intelligence had inserted the first mechanism into the little girl's

mind - surgically implanted and requisite for the mission. Proof positive that the girl was in fact bred by the engineer himself there in the closed area - a young human primed and designed for the express purposes of brutal experimentation.

Cora pulled on the taut flesh of the thigh further, thus revealing the symbol all the more, yet careful in doing so, for the marking was still fresh - indicative that the recipient had been put through a very intensive trauma-induced programming indeed, for to have such a mark at such a relatively advanced stage of life was a contradiction in terms - an enigma layered within a sweeping array of deception effected by meticulous effort by no small number of organizational personnel, all working clandestinely and many in situations requiring deep cover. Cora Beth's mirth deepened, her disturbing leer expanding, for her appreciation for torment and molestation trebled with the apprehension of the very depths and profound intricacies of the multi-layered executed conspiracies which had conveyed the child to this point.

Like the children of the black widow itself who ate their fathers within nature in a culling and in a bondage administered by the one who bore them, only to be consumed by another dread mother - or their own in the concourse of passage of time then in the by and by - the recipients of the maker's mark bearing that arachnid image, regardless of sex, were both products of an extremely attentive cultivation even as they were only present for a relative season and then gone, suddenly, like chaff upon the cold winter wind - the mechanisms of

cruel mother commandant for whom the cult recruiters speculated that the mark was designed to represent, though the full import of the sign was only known by the engineer himself.

Beyond the complex and perplexing nature of the subject before her Cora Beth knew very well - some of her peer sisters even more so - that all of them were ensconced within the conspiracies of and trapped inextricably within the web of the commandant's will to the very person. Like the changeability of storms upon the coast as they coalesced, broke apart and then came together once again, often in forms entirely more dangerous than their prior incarnations, the vagaries of her intent were seldom correctly predicted - yet very often catastrophic for those who built their houses upon sand whereas she herself sat not upon rock but in granite as the ultimate decisive factor - she who was holocaust.

The button upon the long metal cane, dragging its thick rubberized cord behind it, was switched again and the lights within the room flickered and stabilized once again as the current flowed anew into the instrument of torture which began once more, raining down blow upon blow upon the securely restrained victim. The smell of burning flesh now permeated the room and thin wisps of smoke could be seen curling into the air from the blackened swath of torment upon the girl's posterior as the closed area erupted into shrieks of pain which would be anathema to anyone with a shred of humanity left, yet filled the cult recruiters with a profound glee and satisfaction.

As the screams and protestations of the penitent became increasingly incoherent Astrid's blind eyes narrowed as she began to search further within her internal vision.

In her internal awareness she continued to smell burning, the acrid stench of smoke - yet it was not the localized wisps that drifted upward from the obscenity of the punishment in the here and now but a more all-encompassing result of a greater destruction - of both bodies and infrastructures. Whereas the odors of the little girl's ruination pleased her immensely, the scent that she now encountered in her state of prophecy was a disturbance, causing an anxiety increasing to horror. In her vision, while her sight was restored, Astrid's hearing was impaired - a continual, incessant tonal ringing in the ears and pain mounting upon pain. Her shadow self lifted a now skeletal hand to one side of her head and withdrew it and saw that it was stained with blood - not the blood of a captive or opponent but her own, dripping from the mutilated canals and perhaps further hemorrhage of the mind itself.

She crawled like a wraith, pale arms stretching out from shimmering black robes, through the crumbling, burning walls - the entire scene lit like something from hell as the flickering of flames cast its horrific imposition upon piles of bleeding severed limbs, gratuitously embedded with large nails and other even more damnation-dealing shrapnel. Astrid crawled upon those hills of strewn and mangled bodies, the reek of calamity all about her. Within the astral body which she inhabited during her seeress journey she rolled atop that pile of

dismembered and bursted gore, seeking for a sign beyond the obscuring clouds of the improvised explosive device which had been planted - but when, by whom?

The concourse of time began to speed forward and Astrid found herself staring now beyond the razor-tipped fences separating the regional command center from the long miles of scorched wilderness which lay beyond. She saw now upon the far western hills the orange radiance of the post-nuclear sun begin to makes its first sighting - dawn had arrived.

CHAPTER 46

The sun began to rise over the rolling, wooded landscape that stretched out to the west - orange and signaling malignant - strangely dying - a portent of another day of horror in the experimental region.

As the messenger was dragged out from her all-night ordeal within regional command, led through the corridors and then out through the same bay doors where Bluebird and Britta had first exited on their forward campaign, Britta now perched herself upon one of the heavy metal panels of her personal armored carrier, legs outstretched and arms resting upon the flat black painted surface.

Thin, blue smoke trailed upward into the cold air, still partially dark, emanating from the smoldering ember upon the tip of her thick cigar, the acrid smoke oily with not only the harsh tobacco but laced as well with a narcotic designed for her especially by loyal attendants. She had picked up the habit as it were from the lieutenant - one whom she had recently recruited into her own personal coterie - inspired toward a continuation of the same by her memories of the field marshal and her sexual awakening by his very hands.

Long hours would be hers to fill and this, the breaking dawn, only the first segment of her activities

and far from the most fell on this day. She would fill them as she wished and as the necessities of the region dictated. For her, the despot, they were one and the same. Her will and dictates in conjunction with that of Bluebird were the law - a law enforced with an authority most dread.

The messenger had been outfitted immediately prior to her extraction from the preparatory area within the hidden halls within regional command - a needle held aloft and then rammed down betwixt the ribcage beneath a pale, sweaty chest - a shot of pure adrenaline synthesized by engineering and delivered by the cult recruiter's expert hands.

As her eyes drew wide, awakening from the near comatose state that the incessant trauma-induced programming had effected, her mouth opened, gasping for air, and immediately upon so doing Cora Beth inserted a dental gag, forcing maintenance of posture, while another sister shoved a metal ampule within, bearing inside a transmission from the sisters rendered in such a fashion that they dared, hoped, that the horror lying within the outer woods would understand.

The distance to the one official portal into the poisoned forest which led into the wilderness beyond was within walking distance, and although Britta would have wished to hear the monstrous grinding of the motor beneath her - to feel the lurch of her death-dealing apparatus launching into forward motion - she took the conservative option and leapt from the vehicle onto the ground beneath, throwing down the stub of her cigar

which was immediately picked up by one of the strange children born from the issue of Nadezhda and Bonn's incest - one of the only demographics amongst the experimental region whom she would have allowed such a liberty to be taken.

The messenger was in the harshest throes of mania by this point - her naked body contorting and fighting against the two cult recruiters who held her in thrall, tight grips upon either side of her upper arms as she kicked and fought with unnatural speed against the restraining hands of her erstwhile disciplinarians and their cohorts - consciousness manipulated by chemical measures but also on an instinctive level knowing that a mission suffused with the sure promise of doom awaited her.

Britta watched with pleasure - now at ground level - as the froth of the girl's saliva dripped down her chin, observing with pleasure the blackened ruination of her posterior which had been subjected to tortures not only encouraged by but in fact designed with the intents of her and her older sister in mind, both of them having acted in an advisory capacity - albeit covertly - in concern to the preparations prior to dispatch which the both of them had deemed more than necessary.

Bluebird still slept as Britta went about her business as the symbolic head of the procession as it embarked now on foot toward the portal - she acting as the chairman emeritus while the cult recruiters and the ancillary organization personnel effected the actual business end of the transaction.

Within her own bedchambers Bluebird nestled amongst white satin sheets - the slight rustling bringing visions within her nightmares of a certain and impending prophecy which would see the world which she knew now thrust into a doom into which there would be no ready survivors and in the engendering of such which she too would be forfeit - her organic vehicle swept along in the winds of holocaust like all others - a microcosmic smear of blood upon a planet which would then, in time, no longer exist in any way which would be habitable to mankind - whatever the level of its acceleration or alteration.

Yet, she augured within her disturbed sleep, there was indeed a present consciousness without. She raised herself from the confines of her swirling white sheets - white body immaculate, pale, regal and terrible in countenance, raised now in full and staring forward, ever forward - forward toward a future situation in which the most chaotic turns of fortune were to be effected. There lay her death and death for the very planet itself, forevermore. Yet, she augured, yet, there in the dark skies of infinite material space there was a malignant force - a hideous darkness - shining down upon them - waves upon waves, ranks upon ranks. But from what point were their origin?

Along the perimeter of the poisoned forest the dread company made its way forward - the sounds from within beginning to rise in their issue as the breaking dawn increased into the full light of a wintry morning.

Britta strode intentfully, not taking up the van - that position inhabited by the twin cult recruiters who held

the messenger in their cruel, restraining hands - but rather situating herself in a middling position amongst their number, affording her both the security due to her and a vantage point where she could watch the struggling of the messenger. The protestations of the latter ultimately impotent in that they would not facilitate escape, yet intentful by her programming in the sure knowledge that it would - they so hoped - present an added layer of interest, enticement, to the beast which lay beyond.

Plumes of steam were visible from the nostrils of the messenger as they neared within sight of the portal opening - her breath quickening as panic increased, the smell of her fear a palpable scent that all of the assembly could ascertain and which they knew that which lay beyond would as well.

The portal opening was large, circular and engineered according to the maximum security precedents found back at headquarters proper, equipped from stores from the very same, set within a riot of lethal concertina wire which glistened beneath the rays of the morning sun.

In the oral constriction in which she found herself, no screams of a normative sort were able to be effected by the messenger, only the bizarre sounds that escaped from the dual restraint of the spider gag and the metal ampule.

Upon a naked inner thigh blood dripped, thick and congealing, obscuring the sign of the black widow

thereupon as second witness.

A member of internal security detached themselves from the small procession as they neared the gateway - crouching down and removing a large keyring and unlocking the multiple secure mechanisms which held it fast, the latches and internal locking mechanisms resounding one by one as the black-masked organization personnel effected the opening of each and every one until finally the steel entrance swung outward.

A stench erupted from the portal as the seal was broken - the nauseating stench of all things rotting, intermingled with the poisons of the chemical and radiological payloads which had rested on the already sour earth of the forest, melding together for weeks passing into months and now disturbed.

Britta raised herself back upon her heels and sneered with a grim satisfaction as the messenger - now kicking and fighting in earnest - was thrust through the barrier. Naked sacrifice pushed through to a grisly fate. Crier in the wilderness.

As the steel portal gate slammed shut behind her, Britta and the company heard the sounds of protest - the banging upon the access point now closed faint even though immediately on the other side through the thickness of the barrier. Possibilities that the messenger might attempt to sacrifice herself upon the razor-wire along the perimeter were few due to the fact that a circular tunnel-shaped passage, a half-circle upon the earth and upon which the messenger was now set was surrounded by thick and dense growth which led on all

other stretches of the gates for long distances. Even still, the internal security personnel present let out several bursts of automatic gunfire from their machined rifles along the immediate sides - an indicator to the messenger that only death would meet her should she attempt a foray back over the perimeter, exfiltrating herself unofficially from the mission at hand.

The messenger stumbled then began to run as the firing commenced behind her - the sound of the experimental region proper beginning to fade out while the yawning zero silence of the poisoned forest stretched forward before her - her destiny, right or wrong.

On the other side of the concertina wire barrier the children of incest began to pool around the feet of the small death goddess as she rubbed her hands salaciously across the exposed portions of her body - an expanse of terror - a most dangerous manifestation of the material energy.

Beyond in the poisoned forest the patter of the messenger's feet along the leaf-strewn concourse forward was muted, but the sound of the crashing dead limbs and trees in their falling was unmistakeable - approach of the evil spirit.

Now a real hell was being built - not existing in some plane of existence accessed only by methods most occult, or entered into involuntarily by dint of profound transgression, but rather a hell on earth - the cult recruiters its arch-deacons, the commandant its Satan.

This was the hell accessed by dint of birth itself and, as the razor-wire encircling the organizational territories expanded, the deepest circles of the same became evermore present and inescapable, their touch felt by all.

ISBN 9780997836363

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